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Leo Strauss and Nietzsche on Education and History

by

Tobin L. Craig 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Political Science

Edmonton, Alberta

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University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance a thesis entitled *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche on Education and History* submitted by Tobin L. Craig in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

The following thesis is a consideration of the views of Leo Strauss and Friedrich Nietzsche on the subjects of education and history. In the first part, through a comparison of Strauss' essay 'What is Liberal Education?' and Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Strauss' reflections on 'liberal education' are shown to have been inspired by, if not modelled on, Nietzsche's 'untimely meditation'. In the second part, Strauss' 'Political Philosophy and History' is set against Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, and Strauss' critique of historicism is also shown to have been crafted with Nietzsche's essay in mind. The conclusion offers speculations as to why Strauss went to such lengths to conceal Nietzsche's profound and pervasive influence on his own thinking.

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“the inexplicable fact that we live precisely today, when we had all infinite time to come into existence, that we possess only a shortlived today in which to demonstrate why and to what end we came into existence now and at no other time”

Over the course of my singular education, but in particular in the time invested into reflecting on Strauss and Nietzsche's understanding of education, I have had ample opportunity to consider my debts so aptly expressed in the above words, though I suspect I shall never get out from under them. To have been blessed by a power I know not how to name with precisely this existence, with precisely my educators and friends, precisely here and precisely now is a gift which I only dream of truly deserving. Heartfelt need and piety to that same unfathomable power compel me to try, however, and to at least pay my tributes, inadequate though they will no doubt be, to those who have taught, loved and learned with me.

“No one who possesses true friends knows what true solitude is”

To my friends, whose patience with my at times unbearably erratic temperament, whose generous hours of conversation, and whose shared pursuit of the noble and the good has taught me, encouraged me, shamed me, and bettered me, I can say only “thank you”, but I can mean so much more. In particular Paul Diduk, Travis Hadley, Andrea Kowalchuk and Natalie Elliot I would like to thank for their enthusiasm, their curiosity, and their most impressive intellectual honesty. Benjamin Campbell I would like to thank for being my constant companion in both the dojo and the university -- we both have grown so much, but miraculously not apart. David Verbitsky, I would like to thank for rousing me from satisfaction with the conventional, and directing me down avenues I would have never otherwise explored. Finally, I must thank my lovely and loving Sonya Ensslen whose confidence in me drives me to get better in the hopes of deserving it.

“only accident of birth decides whether a given individual has chance of becoming a gentleman or will necessarily become a villain”

To my family, whose loving support and patience apparently knows no bounds (for, so help me, I would have found them!), I can confidently assert that this thesis would not exist were it not for them. To my beautiful and delightful sister, whose infectious sense of humour and pure soul kept me human over the last few months, you will always have my love and tender affections. To my mother, who has suffered twenty-four years of me, whose own steadfastness and unflinching generosity has given the world a family, a school, and the very example of a mother, you have my love and

thanks.

“nothing better or happier can befall a man than to be in the presence of one of those victors”

To Dr. Heidi Studer, lifelong friend and teacher, you have taught me so much about myself and my world, thank you. Thanks also to Dr. Burch for serving on my committee, and for challenging my approach, prejudices and conclusions from the beginning of my liberal education to the present. I should also like to thank Dr. Tupper for kindly reading this thesis and bringing an alternative perspective to bear on it.

Fourthly, but essentially, I must thank Sensei Kurt Taylor for having “wrung from this flesh of apes, a human stance”. If the finished product of a liberal education is a cultured human being, and not merely a cultured mind, as I suppose, then it is to Sensei Taylor that I attribute those qualities of soul, to the extent that I manifest them at all, which are only earned through sweat. Thank you.

In describing his education in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche likens his reading of Schopenhauer to “a son being instructed by his father”. Later he proclaims that Schopenhauer “promised to make his heirs only those who would and could be more than merely his readers: namely his sons and pupils.” If the model educational relationship is that between father and son, surely I could not have been better born! To my father I can only repeat what Nietzsche said with respect to the Greeks: that being your heir is both my honour and my spur. You are my hero, in this life where the heroic is the highest possible. I owe you everything I am, but, like this thesis, I want to make it a little better before I give it back.

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1

INTRODUCTION

My work has *time* and I want to avoid at all costs being confused with the task that stands before the present as *its* assignment. Fifty years from now a few perhaps... will have eyes to see what has been done through me.¹

Though perhaps not widely recognized as such, Leo Strauss is the most important philosophic scholar of the twentieth century.² Having almost single-handedly restored to life the once languishing study of the history of political philosophy, a feat which I am told would have been unimaginable but four decades ago, academic political science and philosophy today is incomprehensible without a recognition of Strauss' impact. What was then an almost totally irrelevant sub-sub-section in American political science departments has become the locus of some of the most interesting and influential work now being done in those departments. And whereas but a generation ago the history of political thought would be taught from a textbook comprising superficial redactions of the great thinkers' views, focusing especially on each one's historical context, and offering stock arguments against their positions, today major commercial as well as university presses compete to market scholarly editions of all the original works, as well as learned commentaries and interpretive essays focused on them. There can be little doubt that this is primarily due to the influence of Leo Strauss. For virtually none of his contemporaries argued for the importance of reading complete texts as carefully crafted wholes, or regarded the study of the history of political philosophy as anything but of antiquarian interest. Especially noteworthy is the transformation in the way the classic texts are

¹Nietzsche, as quoted by Karl Lowith in *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, p189.

² Many commentators, mostly 'Straussian', have made similar claims. See Thomas Pangle, 'Editor's Introduction' to *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, pvii, Robert C. Bartlett, *The Idea of Enlightenment*, p54, Nathan Tarlov and Thomas Pangle, 'Epilogue: Leo Strauss and the History of Political Philosophy' in *History of Political Philosophy*, p907. For similar claims made by 'non-Straussians', see Shadia Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, p1, and Wilmore Kendall's remarks as quoted by Kenneth Deutsch and John Murley in the 'Preface' to *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*, pxi.

studied, most noticeable with respect to the Platonic dialogues, but affecting the entire corpus of the tradition.³

Moreover, like any truly great scholar, Strauss' influence extended and continues to extend well beyond the confines of the discipline he ostensibly specialized in. Slowly, but noticeably, the quality of his scholarly/philosophic efforts is being acknowledged by classicists, intellectual historians, professors of philosophy, and others -- if not always with open attribution, then through unacknowledged appropriation.⁴

Finally, through his primary vocation as a teacher, he built an entire self-subsisting, self-perpetuating ‘school of thought’ which, now and for the foreseeable future, demands to be addressed by academic scholars of all creeds and sects.⁵ Some have gone so far as to attribute to Strauss a profound shaping influence on the character of the American regime. While this observation is sometimes cast in conspiratorial language,⁶ there can be no doubt that as the educator, or educator of the educators of some prominent American political actors and voices, Strauss has made a significant contribution to the American regime.⁷

This miracle of re-education and re-vivification is at least partly the result of the shelf full of superb book-length philosophic commentaries and essay collections he left to

³ Stanley Rosen, *Metaphysics in Ordinary Language*, p62.

⁴ Cf. Allan Bloom, *Giants and Dwarfs*, p255. Stanley Rosen in, *Plato's Statesman* observes, “his work has been silently appropriated by so many of his critics without a hint of obligation, and even with an explicit denial of debts incurred” pix.

⁵ As Father Ernest Fortin notes, “A sure sign of [Strauss’] posthumous success is that everybody in academic circles has to pretend to know him. People have made a career of attacking or defending him. A good number of them have been promoted or denied promotion on the basis of their affiliation with him.” ‘Between the Lines’, *Crisis*, December, 1989, p19.

⁶ As, e.g., in Shadia Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, and *Leo Strauss and the American Right*.

⁷ For some indication of the extent of Strauss’ direct political influence, see note 4 of Deutch and Murley’s ‘Preface’ to *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*. Though, as Father Fortin notes, “[Straussians] have not only infiltrated the academy but occupy key positions in government, the media, and on the boards of large foundations. I do not wish to give the impression that the country is about to be taken over by them, as some of their critics fear, for nothing could be further from the truth. We are still talking about a relatively small and to some extent persecuted minority, but a minority that, like the early Christians, has managed to attract more attention than would have been thought possible...” Fortin, *Ibid.*

posteriority. No doubt it will be through his books that Strauss will continue to exercise his influence well into the future, whenever a suitably enthusiastic young person chances upon his books and willingly labors to transform good fortune into just desert. However, in the judgment of Allan Bloom, “Only a tiny number of men who did not fall under the spell of his personal charm were profoundly affected by his books.”⁸

Thus, presuming Bloom’s views to be correct, it would seem that the greatest part of his current influence has come about, directly or indirectly, through the over thirty-years of university teaching Strauss engaged in at some of the most prestigious and prominent universities and colleges in America.⁹ As one recent commentator observed, “Strauss’ political activity, to the extent one can speak of such a thing, was primarily realized in education”.¹⁰ His teaching must have been peerless, for never before or since in the American university have a group of young people from such diverse backgrounds manifested such deep and abiding allegiance to a single teacher. One could cite instance after instance of students of Strauss describing in the warmest of terms their experiences both in and out of the classroom with Leo Strauss as educator. This is grudgingly acknowledged even by those who continue to scorn his approach and to regret his influence, inasmuch as they prefer to portray the ‘Straussians’ as members of a cult, bordering on the fanatical in their zealous devotion to their teacher. Further testimony to Strauss’ abilities as a teacher, and to his commitment to education, is evidenced by the dedication to teaching that many, probably most, of his students, inspired by his example, took to heart themselves. As to the seriousness with which they in turn discharge their vocation, the best evidence is admittedly anecdotal, but there is an

⁸ *Giants and Dwarfs*, p250

⁹ Strauss taught at the New School, the University of Chicago, Claremont Men’s College, and St. John’s, though it was primarily at Chicago that he laid the foundation for his revolution in the teaching and research of political philosophy.

¹⁰ Nasser Behnegr, as quoted in Walter Nicgorski, ‘Allan Bloom: Strauss, Socrates, and Liberal Education’, *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*, p211.

impressive amount of it. Another indication is the substantial body of writings on liberal education which students of Strauss have crafted or participated in (Allan Bloom's surprise super-success, *The Closing of the American Mind*, being merely the best known). As Werner Dannhauser -- student of Strauss and long-time teacher of distinction himself -- observes: "Yet notwithstanding all their infirmities and iniquities..., on the average, Straussians are teachers whose quality is far above the average."¹¹

Leo Strauss was, however, and remains very controversial, perhaps even more so since his death than when still alive. Strauss first caught the attention -- and aroused the ire -- of the professional political science establishment when he and some of his students (and colleagues) openly challenged the positivist-inspired 'behavioral revolution' in political science. The subsequent discrediting and collapse of that movement has not produced a vindication of Strauss' attack even though the validity of all his criticisms are today widely acknowledged. Rather, he remains perceived as profoundly out of step with the dominant tone and approach of contemporary political science. Strauss, it would seem, was untimely then and still is so now.

Partly in reaction to Strauss' growing influence, now spreading to Europe, he has been charged with founding a quasi-religious sect, with cultivating dogmatic disciples rather than open-minded scholars, with being an 'elitist' authoritarian, an enemy of democracy, even with instigating a conspiracy to subvert it. But beyond the inflamed language with which Strauss and his students are frequently caricatured and reviled, there are some serious and significant disputes which cut across the lines dividing partisans from critics of the 'Straussian' camp. These controversies bear on both the character of his politics -- in particular his disposition towards the American regime -- and his understanding of philosophy. My undertaking here will be largely confined to examining

¹¹ Werner Dannhauser, 'Teaching: Leo Strauss: Becoming Naive Again', *American Scholar*, 1975, p637.

one particular controversy pertinent to Strauss' relationship to the philosophic tradition. However, to the end of situating the present study within these broader debates, I will briefly note what I perceive to be the central points of contention with respect to Strauss and his legacy.

The first major, and perhaps most visible, point of dispute -- preoccupying many of his former students and admirers -- concerns Strauss' respective commitments to Judaism and philosophy. Nor is it at all difficult to recognize the seeds of this controversy in Strauss' own writings. Strauss' corpus, primarily focused on the history of political philosophy, is regularly punctuated by serious and perplexing treatments of what he frequently identified, following Spinoza, as the 'Theologico-Political question'. In his important and oft-cited autobiographical Preface to the English edition of *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, which he added some 35 years after its original publication in 1930, Strauss seems to indicate that it was through his reflection on Spinoza that he was led back to the Jewish and Islamic medieval thinkers, especially Maimonides, who in turn led him back to the ancients, and to Plato in particular.¹² In this 'Preface', Strauss seems to root his entire intellectual biography in his Jewish heritage.¹³ Indeed, it is difficult to avoid suspecting that Strauss actively sought to foster and encourage this controversy between what he repeatedly referred to in terms of 'Jerusalem and Athens'. Though this controversy about him and his writings frequently descends into biographical speculation and anecdotal reporting, there can be little doubt that at its higher levels, it raises serious

¹² See note 118, p114 to Remi Brague's essay, in Allan Udoff's collection *Leo Strauss's Thought* and p105-6. Brague hints that Strauss may have been brought to Farabi, Maimonides and the medieval enlightenment through Nietzsche. In his superb essay 'Athens and Washington' Gregory Bruce Smith directly asserts, "Strauss discovered Nietzsche's Platonism before he turned to the systematic study of Jewish thought that occupied a good deal of his early scholarly efforts" (*Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime*, p105).

¹³ Though, as Lampert notes, referring to the 'Preface', "The penultimate paragraph of Strauss' [] essay makes the unnamed Nietzsche the turning point in his intellectual journey, the liberator from contemporary prejudice who opened the vista backward." p6.

and challenging questions which must be accommodated by anyone purporting to offer a comprehensive account of Strauss' thought.

The contention that Strauss himself was a serious, believing Jew and that his philosophic efforts were compatible with his Judaism is insightfully argued by Kenneth Hart Green in his work *Jew and Philosopher*.¹⁴ Green's, however, is not the most widespread formulation of this controversy. To the contrary, it tends to be dominated by those who argue that Strauss was a believer (on the one hand), and those who contend that Strauss was an atheist (but who avoided explicitly acknowledging the fact). The latter group tends to cast the debate between Reason and Revelation as apparently insoluble, with some going further, arguing that this itself constitutes a decisive refutation of philosophy; and that Strauss, preoccupied with this issue, sought a defense of philosophy -- a vindication of philosophy -- which meets this distinctly Kierkegaardian challenge. So, their argument goes, virtually all of Strauss' works are to be interpreted as contributing to the elucidation of this question. This reading of Strauss might be called the 'orthodox interpretation' in that it is apparently endorsed by a majority of 'leading' Straussians.¹⁵ And it is tangentially relevant to the present thesis inasmuch as it would seem to distance Strauss from Nietzsche, for whom such 'thought-experiments' would have pained the conscience of one who so prided himself on his intellectual probity.

Secondly, there is controversy regarding his 'method' of interpreting major texts in the history of political philosophy. Whereas the previous controversy is mainly amongst

¹⁴ Compare Susan Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, and Hadley Arkes' essay, 'Strauss on our Minds' in *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*.

¹⁵ See David Bolotin's essay, 'Leo Strauss and Classical Political Philosophy', Robert C. Bartlett's recent book, *The Idea of Enlightenment*, and the forthcoming essays by Christopher Bruell ('On the Place of the Treatment of Classical Philosophy in the Plan of the Work as a Whole') and David Bolotin ('The Two Chapters on Classical Philosophy in *Natural Right and History*') on Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, versions of which were presented and distributed at the recent conference on *Natural Right and History* at Michigan State University.

Straussians, by and large this debate about Straussian ‘hermeneutics’ is carried on between ‘Straussians’ and non- or anti- Straussians.¹⁶ Strauss is credited by his followers (and blamed by his detractors) for his rediscovery (or invention) of the art of esoteric writing. Strauss held, contrary to historicists of all sorts, that the goal of textual interpretation is to understand the text as the author understood it himself. Moreover, he believed that the great philosophic writers of our tradition, often faced with the threat of persecution and always with the politically unsettling character of their own political and philosophic views, chose to conceal those views beneath a fairly conventional and temporally tailored veneer of rhetoric. Their true philosophic teaching, which discloses itself only to careful, thoughtful readers, is uncovered by working through conspicuous silences, apparent contradictions, and puzzling images. Strauss’ own interpretations and those of his students are accordingly the subject of both passionate praise and vehement denunciation.

Third is the controversy most relevant to my present purpose. There has recently emerged a particularly heated dispute regarding the relationship of Strauss’ own philosophic views, and the extent of his intellectual debts, to Nietzsche. The present study will have very little to contribute to the first controversy (Strauss as Jew and/or philosopher), though I readily grant that any comprehensive account of Leo Strauss’ thought must explain, without explaining away, the lengths he went towards reviving a debate apparently doomed to irrelevancy in modern scientific secular democracy. As for the second controversy, about esotericism, I will offer some observations regarding the matter of Straussian interpretation, but my views on this topic will be disclosed as much by how I interpret Strauss’s own writings as by any explicit remarks on the subject.

¹⁶ At the highest levels, for instance in the exchange between Gadamer and Strauss (*Independent Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.II, 1978, p5) this debate can be quite illuminating.

Finally, with respect to controversies regarding Strauss' politics, again, I confine myself to pointing out the political implications that emerge from the analysis I have undertaken of Strauss' writings.

Most scholars, particularly those friendly to him, regard Strauss as strongly and definitely opposed to Nietzsche. And there can be no doubt that he sought to appear so. However, primarily as the result some recent and highly visible works on Strauss, the question as to the extent of Nietzsche's influence on Strauss has been reopened. This has been fueled as well by the publication of more of his correspondence and unpublished essays and lectures, which in themselves seem to require a reconsideration of Strauss' relationship to Nietzsche. Conclusions in favor of a more 'Nietzschean' Strauss, however, must include an explanation of his apparent reservations about this controversial and dangerous German; that is, one must explain why Strauss concealed his affinity with Nietzsche beneath an anti-Nietzschean veneer.

I shall begin my own case with a number of quotations and observations which indicate that Strauss actually held Nietzsche in the highest regard. In a now famous private letter to Karl Lowith, Strauss remarks, "Nietzsche so dominated and charmed me between my 22nd and 30th years that I literally believed everything I understood of him."¹⁷ Next we may notice the apparent praise for Nietzsche in this statement from a posthumously published lecture on Heidegger:

It is certainly not an overstatement to say that no one has ever spoken so greatly and so nobly of what a philosopher is as Nietzsche. This is not to deny that the philosophers of the future as Nietzsche described them

¹⁷ 'Correspondence of Karl Lowith and Leo Strauss', *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, vol5/6, p183. Though private and presumably very telling, commentators on Strauss have taken this confession variously. Some, like Catherine Zuckert, have focused on the specific temporal limits Strauss indicates, arguing that the thirty-something Strauss moved beyond Nietzsche (see *Postmodern Platos* p105). Others, such as Laurence Lampert (*Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, p5ff) and Gregory Bruce Smith (*Athens and Washington*, p105-7) imply that Strauss only came closer to Nietzsche upon better understanding him, or that his late essay 'Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*' is an indication of the continuing influence of Nietzsche on his own thinking.

remind one much more than Nietzsche himself seems to have thought of *Plato's philosophers*.¹⁸

Coming from one whose lifetime interest in Platonic political philosophy is famous, and whose concern with the Platonic philosopher-king pervades his corpus, this could count as a ringing endorsement. And notice, Strauss's use here of 'seems' leaves open the possibility that Nietzsche was actually fully aware of what Strauss claims, and even that Strauss suspects as much. In this connection, it is perhaps worth noting how significant it is that Nietzsche is explicitly identified with the 'third wave of modernity' in Strauss' important essay 'The Three Waves of Modernity'. If, as surely must be assumed, Strauss has the three-wave pattern of Book V of the *Republic* in mind, this would imply that Nietzsche is being (esoterically) associated with the wave that introduces the philosopher-king.¹⁹ Thirdly, there is the fact that Strauss, for whom the problem of relativism (in the form of either historicism or the fact-value distinction) is the central challenge to the possibility of philosophy in the contemporary world, identifies Nietzsche as "*the philosopher of relativism*" because he is "the first thinker who faced the problem of relativism in its full extent and pointed to the way in which relativism could be overcome."²⁰ Note that Strauss here attributes to Nietzsche *the way*, and not merely *a way*, in which relativism could be overcome. Finally, and especially significant for those who would prefer to believe that Strauss invented (or imagined) the need for esoteric interpretations of past philosophers' writings, one can point directly to Nietzsche's identical teaching to that effect.²¹

¹⁸ 'Existentialism', *Interpretation* vol.22, no.3, p315. Also, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p40-1.

¹⁹ 'The Three Waves of Modernity', *Political Philosophy*, p94-8.

²⁰ 'Relativism' *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p24.

²¹ Cf. e.g., *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorisms 30 and 40, *Twilight of the Idols*, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man' #26, *The Antichrist*, #23.

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Against these and numerous other indications I could offer,²² those who will not hear of a Nietzschean Strauss may point to various passages in which Strauss seems to indict Nietzsche with furthering the present crisis, and in particular with leading to the horrors of twentieth century Nazism. The most visible and apparently damaging of these passages is the conclusion to the title essay in *What is Political Philosophy?* Leading up to this critique is a portrait of Nietzsche's project which is decidedly non-committal. It culminates, however, in Strauss' juxtaposition of Nietzsche's vision of a "planetary aristocracy" with Marx's "universal classless and stateless society". The crux of Strauss' critique is the sentence which follows this opposition between Nietzsche and Marx: "Being certain of the tameness of modern western man, [Nietzsche] preached the sacred right of 'merciless extinction' of large masses of men with as little restraint as his great antagonist had done." Strauss proceeds to make of Nietzsche the prime suspect for the worst excesses of Nazism. "He left [his readers] no choice except that between irresponsible indifference to politics and irresponsible political options. He thus prepared a regime which, while it lasted, made discredited democracy look again like a golden age."²³

A similar set of observations conclude 'The Three Waves of Modernity'. Again juxtaposing Nietzsche and Marx, Strauss observes, "[W]hat [Nietzsche] said was read by political men and inspired them. He is as little responsible for fascism as Rousseau is responsible for Jacobinism. This means, however, that he is as much responsible for fascism as Rousseau was for Jacobinism."²⁴

These attributions of political irresponsibility on Nietzsche's part would seem to

²² Strauss' regular use of distinctly Nietzschean locutions such as "the one thing needful", "par excellence", "intellectual probity", "sacrifice of the intellect", "human all too human" being prominent, albeit inconclusive examples.

²³ *What is Political Philosophy?* , p54-5. See also Plato's seventh Letter.

²⁴ As reproduced in *Political Philosophy*, Hilail Gilden, ed., p98.

reach their fever pitch in the conclusion of the essay ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’. There, once more linking Marx and Nietzsche and apparently charging both with political irresponsibility, Strauss notes:

[W]e cannot expect that liberal education will lead all who benefit from it to understand their civic responsibility in the same way or to agree politically. Karl Marx, the father of communism, and Friedrich Nietzsche, the step-grandfather of fascism, were liberally educated on a level to which we cannot hope to aspire. But perhaps one can say that their grandiose failures make it easier for us who have experienced those failures to understand again the old saying that wisdom cannot be separated from moderation and hence to understand that wisdom requires unhesitating loyalty to a decent constitution and even to the cause of constitutionalism. Moderation will protect us against the twin dangers of visionary expectations from politics and unmanly contempt for politics.²⁵

Carefully considered, however, in each of these cases Strauss has left Nietzsche an ‘out’. For instance, one can reach no conclusions from this last quotation as to Nietzsche’s ‘step-grandfatherly’ responsibility for Fascism without carefully considering both Nietzsche’s and Strauss’ use of terms such as ‘step-mother’, ‘step-child’, and so on. For example, Nietzsche speaks of nature’s step-motherly mood as actually *hostile* to its child.²⁶

Having supplied this brief survey of the variegated terrain upon which the battle over Strauss’ relationship to Nietzsche is waged, I intend to examine the recently revived view that when Strauss is himself read as he taught others to read previous philosophers, Strauss emerges as profoundly sympathetic to Nietzsche, holding views very closely related to his controversial predecessor.

The most important contribution to this (often heated) debate is, far and away,

²⁵ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p24.

²⁶ *Schopenhauer as Educator*, p130.

12

Laurence Lampert's 1996 book *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*. While others have flirted with the thesis, one even making headlines with it (and thus a mockery of it),²⁷ and an unknown number may silently suspect it, Laurence Lampert had the courage and the requisite scholarly qualities needed for rigorously and openly exploring it. He took as his departure point the only essay Strauss wrote for publication explicitly focused on Nietzsche: 'Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*'. This important but enigmatic statement by Strauss on one of Nietzsche's most comprehensive texts is, in Lampert's hands, subjected to a thorough and stunningly illuminating textual exegesis. Lampert applies Strauss' recommendations on reading to Strauss himself, and through doing so presents a most persuasive case that Strauss -- in this very late essay intended to occupy the center of his last collection -- is indicating to those who can penetrate his very dense presentation, that he is, and has always been, following Nietzsche's lead.

This, however, is not the venue in which to explore that broader question. I limit myself to acknowledging that it is Lampert, consummate interpreter of some of Nietzsche's most enigmatic and consequently most misunderstood texts, thus the philosophic scholar best equipped to recognize Nietzschean allusions and uncited quotations -- who has especially inspired a return to Strauss with Nietzsche in mind (or to Nietzsche with Strauss in mind). It is to this project that my effort here is meant to contribute.

The reception of Lampert's book within the Straussian community has been rough and uneven.²⁸ He is frequently mentioned in the same breath as 'commentators' who are laboring to carve a career for themselves by (in effect) villifying Strauss through

associating him with Nietzsche. This is not only unfair to Lampert, but obscuring -- for it
²⁷ Brent Staples, 'Undemocratic Vistas: The Sinister Vogue of Leo Strauss', *New York Times*, November 24, 1994. Mr. Staples clearly took his cues primarily from Ms. Drury's two works on Strauss.

²⁸ This tendency is best indicated by *Interpretation*, in many respects the 'Straussian' Journal, which ran two reviews side-by-side, one favorable, the other critical (Vol. 25, No.3).

overlooks the obvious seriousness and careful attention that distinguishes his work -- and may even be intended to silence others who have similar suspicions with the threat of ostracism. There are reasons for suspecting that there are also some who believe Lampert is correct, but who nonetheless prefer to leave his efforts unacknowledged in the opinion that they are following Strauss' wish to keep Nietzsche at a distance. And insofar as that is their motive, it must command respect -- if not necessarily agreement, bearing in mind Strauss' legacy of peerless exposes of past philosophers. However, for all of the hostility it has aroused, there are some indications that Lampert's thesis is gaining in currency.²⁹ In any event, Lampert's book requires a response by anyone who wishes seriously to discuss Strauss in the future.

The larger issue of Strauss' relation to Nietzsche, however, can be settled only by an exhaustive comparative examination of each thinker's corpus of writings -- quite possibly the work of a lifetime. Given the narrow focus of this present study, I cannot claim to offer anything approaching what would be needed to finally determine the matter. I do believe, however, that the present endeavor makes a significant contribution to that larger question, clearly establishing the Nietzschean influence behind some of Strauss' writings. More precisely, I have undertaken to examine carefully two of Strauss' essays in light of two of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* on similar subjects. The first part (Chapter 1) will compare Strauss' attempt at answering the Socratic question 'What is Liberal Education?' with Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator*. The second part (Chapter 2) will compare the respective thinkers' responses to the challenge of historicism and the problem of history as represented by Strauss' 'Political Philosophy'

²⁹ Gregory Bruce Smith's essay 'Athens and Washington' in the Deutch and Murley collection, *Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime*, and his yet unpublished paper 'Leo Strauss and German Philosophy: Strauss' Post- Heideggarian Synthesis' being particularly important examples.

and History' and Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*.

Beyond the concern with the Strauss-Nietzsche relationship, however, the topics about which their views are to be compared are intrinsically important. No one the least familiar with Strauss' work as both teacher and scholar would deny that education and history are themes of central importance to his overall political-philosophic perspective. As indicated earlier, his efforts at reinvigorating both liberal education in American universities as well as the serious study of the history of political philosophy are major dimensions of Strauss' special significance.³⁰ To find Nietzsche in Strauss's writings on education and history is, I believe, a not insignificant discovery, but rather points squarely in the direction of a Nietzschean Strauss.

Education was a lifelong concern of Strauss. Indeed, as we shall see in the discussion that follows, Strauss himself testifies as much:

I thought that it was my job, my responsibility, to do my best in the classroom, in conversations with students wholly regardless of whether they are registered or not, and last, but not least in my study at home. I own that education is in a sense the subject matter of my teaching and my research.³¹

Recalling again the testimony of his students, virtually all who have written on him concur that he was a teacher *par excellence*.

As for the importance to Strauss of the subject of history, we will address this more fully in our introduction to the third chapter. Suffice it for now to say, the least familiarity with Strauss' work confirms that a concern with history and historicism is central to his undertaking. For in Strauss' eyes, historicism undermines the possibility of seriously studying the history of political philosophy.

³⁰ See David Bolotin's 'Leo Strauss and Classical Political Philosophy', *Interpretation*, Vol.22, No.1, p129-30

³¹ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p9

What about Nietzsche? Are these subjects of similar concern to Nietzsche? This question would hardly be raised were it not for the surprising lack of scholarly attention paid to the *Untimely Meditations*, which were collectively the second major undertaking of Nietzsche's philosophic life and extended over a period of four years. The dominant view among Nietzsche scholars, widely presumed if not expressly argued, is that the essays themselves suffer from their author's immaturity, or that they were held in low esteem by their creator in his maturity, and thus worthy of little regard. This assumption obviously discourages one from investing serious effort and care in studying them. What is astonishing, however, is that such an opinion prevails in spite of ample evidence, some of profound significance, that Nietzsche himself remained to the end fondly proud of his 'Untimely Ones'. While this is obviously not the forum for even beginning to catalogue concepts prominent in these early essays which re-emerge in his later, supposedly more important writings, I must confront this artificially constructed obstacle in order to defend the import I invest these essays with, an assessment which I believe Strauss shared.

The first and most important historical detail, conspicuous even to one totally ignorant of Nietzsche's correspondence, is that the *Untimely Meditations* have no preface. That is, when in 1886 Nietzsche set out to provide new prefaces to all of his earlier works, the *Untimely Meditations* were left as they were. This becomes all the more striking when one familiarizes oneself with the prefaces added to *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Daybreak*, and *Human All Too Human*, wherein Nietzsche is almost embarrassingly self-critical, appearing virtually to renounce whole sections of those works. Whereas Nietzsche appends nothing of the sort to these four essays; they are to stand as they are,

without apology. Particularly pertinent to my point is his preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, wherein he disavows the Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian elements of that work.³² He does nothing of the sort regarding the *Untimely Meditations*. In a letter to his publisher in 1886, Nietzsche remarks, “The four *Untimely Meditations* are the only ones I wish to leave as they are”.³³ Nor are his remarks in *Ecce Homo*, written at the virtual end of his philosophical career and in which he retrospectively evaluates his literary efforts, tinged with any significant hesitations or criticisms.

This continued satisfaction comes through all the more strikingly in Nietzsche’s correspondence. In what is apparently the draft of a letter of 1885 to an unidentified correspondent, Nietzsche declares: “For me, my ‘Untimely Ones’ signify *promises*. What they are for others, I do not know. Believe me, I would have ceased living a long time ago if I had turned aside even a single step from these promises!”³⁴

Nietzsche’s esteem for his *Schopenhauer as Educator* remained particularly high, and he regularly associated it with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Upon having completed the first part of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche observed, “It is curious: I wrote the *commentary* prior to the *text*! Everything was already *promised* in *Schopenhauer as Educator*.³⁵ In the copy of *Schopenhauer as Educator* he presented to his good friend and one time love, Lou Salome, he noted, “this book contains my deepest and most fundamental feelings”.³⁶

As to the importance Strauss invested in the *Untimely Meditations*, his attention primarily focused on the essay on history. In ‘The Three Waves of Modernity’, Strauss depicts Nietzsche’s encounter with Hegelian historicism in terms taken directly from *On*

³² See especially section 6 of the 1886 ‘Attempt at Self-Criticism’

³³ August 29, 1886 as cited by Daniel Breazeale in the editor’s Introduction to the Cambridge University Press, *Untimely Meditations*, pxxiv.

³⁴ See *Ecce Homo* section 3 of ‘The Untimely Essays’ in ‘Why I Write Such Good Books’, and pxxvii of Breazeale’s Introduction.

³⁵ To Peter Gast, April 21, 1883, as cited by Breazeale, *ibid.* pxxviii

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pxxv.

*the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.*³⁷ In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss' most famous and widely read work, the only work of Nietzsche's that is explicitly cited is the history essay.³⁸ Again, in the essay 'Relativism', Strauss introduces Nietzsche as "the philosopher of relativism" and proceeds to elaborate on Nietzsche's confrontation with "a decayed Hegelianism". Strauss refers to "truth that is deadly", "horizons", and "life-giving delusions" -- concepts which (as we shall see) all play a very prominent role in Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*.³⁹ Finally, in the one essay Strauss wrote explicitly on Nietzsche, 'Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*', Strauss refers to both *Schopenhauer as Educator* and *On the Uses and Disadvantages of Life*.⁴⁰

I must emphasize, however, that my primary concern is to point out the Nietzschean echoes in Strauss' essays. Which is to say, I am not here attempting full expositions of Nietzsche's much longer 'meditations'. I will endeavor to argue that the two essays of Strauss, which set the rough limits to the following analysis, are inspired by and deeply informed by Nietzsche's meditations, and so I regularly draw upon those longer works to clarify or expand on particular points. Thus, although my quarry is primarily scholarly (the proximity of the views and approaches of Strauss and Nietzsche), much of the resulting hunting and tracking is philosophic in character (or so I hope). For both Strauss and Nietzsche, as I believe I here show, the only conceivable justification for pursuing scholarly and historical questions (such as what Nietzsche or Strauss thought about education or history) is that they may raise and illuminate timeless philosophic questions. It is with this higher aim in mind that I put forward this small

³⁷ p94ff, *Political Philosophy*.

³⁸ p26, *Natural Right and History*.

³⁹ p24-5, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*.

⁴⁰ p176, p187, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*.

contribution to what might seem -- but is not -- merely a scholarly controversy.

CHAPTER I

NIETZSCHE AS LIBERAL EDUCATOR

He who is a teacher through and through takes all things seriously only in regard to his students -- even himself.

Beyond Good and Evil, aphorism 63

I thought that it was my job, my responsibility, to do my best in the classroom, in conversations with students, wholly regardless of whether they were registered or not, and last but not least in my study at home. I own that education is in a sense the subject matter of my teaching and my research.

'Liberal Education and Responsibility'

Prolegomena to Nietzsche and Strauss on Education

In the ‘Preface’ to *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, Leo Strauss invokes the original, pre-modern meaning of the term ‘liberal’ -- importantly distinct from contemporary usage -- through his reference to “liberal education”. More precisely, Strauss informs us that “we are reminded of [the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns] immediately by the fact that the term ‘liberal’ is still used in its premodern sense, especially in the expression ‘liberal education’”!¹

It would seem, then, that in the conjunction of these two seemingly innocuous words, ‘liberal’ and ‘education’, Strauss would have us recognize an essential distinction between the ancient and the modern perspectives that gives a special salience to the title of this essay collection, and that was so central to his own philosophic history of philosophy.

Strauss begins *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* with the only two essays he wrote explicitly on the subject of liberal education: ‘What is Liberal Education?’ and ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’. The special relationship between them is explicitly acknowledged by Strauss himself, in his describing the second as an elaboration on the first:

I certainly felt that I was particularly ill-prepared to address professional educators on the subject “Education and Responsibility.” But then I learnt to my relief that I was merely expected to explain two sentences occurring in my speech “What is Liberal Education?”²

Aware of their relationship -- that ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’ is an elaboration on ‘What is Liberal Education?’ -- we will occasionally introduce material from the follow -up essay in order to ground and defend our interpretation of the first.

But it is the original essay, which though shorter in length, is actually broader in scope,

¹ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, pix.

² *Ibid*, p10. The two sentences, which we will comment on in due course, are: “Liberal education is the ladder by which we try to ascend from mass democracy to democracy as originally meant. Liberal education is the necessary endeavor to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society.”

that is the primary focus of the present chapter.

Interestingly, both essays were originally conceived as occasional lectures: ‘What is Liberal Education?’ as a graduation address; and ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’ as a presentation to ‘The Fund for Adult Education’. While the former, as Strauss himself saw it published, bears no internal indication of its being originally an occasional speech to a particular audience, the latter does.³ However, as we have seen, in the latter Strauss describes the former as a “speech”.

But if Strauss wrote on liberal education only twice, hardly anyone who ever knew him or was fortunate enough to have studied with him testifies that he was anything other than a most remarkable educator. We have every reason, then, to take seriously his claim, at the outset of ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’ that “education is in a sense the subject matter of [his] teaching and [his] research.”⁴ But Strauss immediately adds the curious remark that “I am almost solely concerned with the goal of education at its best or highest -- of the education of the perfect prince”. What does this mean? Why would Strauss begin an essay entitled, ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’ with such a claim?

While Strauss is widely acknowledged to have inspired a concern for and involvement with liberal education among his students, his writings on liberal education have received scant notice, Walter Nicgorski’s two helpful essays being the notable

³ Strauss did prepare a composite essay made up of these two separate pieces for publication in a collection on liberal education entitled *Higher Education and Modern Democracy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967). Nevertheless, the essays as found in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* must be presumed to be authoritative, as Strauss chose to preserve them in a book of his own essays over which he had total authority.

⁴ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p9.

exceptions.⁵ It seems that even those among his students who recognize that liberal education was a major concern of Strauss nonetheless regard his efforts in this vein as merely peripheral or preliminary to his more explicitly philosophical efforts. We hope to demonstrate through our analysis of this brief essay, that far from being merely polite or politic condescensions to the political community, virtually all of Strauss' core philosophical concerns are raised in this remarkably dense and complex 'graduation address'. So, what follows is an attempt to explicate Strauss' brief, beautiful and Socratically titled essay, 'What is Liberal Education?' paying special attention to its parallels with Nietzsche's third *Untimely Meditation, Schopenhauer as Educator*.

I Education as Agriculture

Leo Strauss begins 'What is Liberal Education?' by apparently answering his own question, offering a formal definition of liberal education: "Liberal education is education in culture or toward culture. The finished product of a liberal education is a cultured human being" (3/1).⁶ By means of an etymological connection, Strauss draws upon our understanding of agriculture in an effort to recapture the older, 'original', one may say 'old-fashioned' conception of culture. "'Culture' (*cultura*) means primarily agriculture: the cultivation of the soil and its products, taking care of the soil, improving the soil in

⁵ 'Leo Strauss and Liberal Education' in *Interpretation*, Vol.13, No.2 and 'Allan Bloom: Strauss, Socrates, and Liberal Education', in *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*. Of course, as the title of the latter of these two essays reminds us, Allan Bloom must be regarded as that one among Strauss's students who has done the most to draw attention to the questions surrounding liberal education and the importance of its continued presence. His *The Closing of the American Mind* is, to my mind, a brilliant elaboration on key aspects of Strauss' understanding of the role of liberal education in a mass democracy. This said, Bloom refers to Strauss but once in the book, though this can easily be explained in terms of the audience Bloom is addressing and his desire to shield the already controversial Strauss from any 'guilt by association' with a book Bloom knew would be highly controversial. See also his two essays on the subject, collected in *Giants and Dwarfs*.

⁶ All citations of Strauss will be from the essay 'What is Liberal Education?' as it appears in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Cornell University Press: 1989) unless otherwise indicated. I will cite the page number followed by the number of the paragraph in the essay from which the citation is drawn. For example in this case, the quotation appears on page three, in the first paragraph of the essay, thus: (3/1). All italics will be Strauss' and all underlining my own.

accordance with its nature.” Despite its apparent remoteness from this ‘primary’ meaning, “Culture means derivatively and today chiefly the cultivation of the mind, the taking care and improving of the native faculties in accordance with the nature of the mind” (3/1). This formulation of what culture means here and now, however, might be seen to contrast with what we were told was the end product of a liberal education: a “cultured human being”. What, we are invited to ask, is gained or lost in this apparent narrowing of our understanding of the goal of culture from that of perfecting the whole human being to that of perfecting the mind? What accounts for it? And does Strauss mean to endorse it? As we shall see in what follows, deviations from original understandings must be carefully considered.

We should notice at the outset several important implications of such an understanding of culture. Firstly, it serves as a reminder of the implicitly teleological character of the very idea of culture. Such an understanding does not accord well with the general approach provided by -- cultivated by -- modern science.

Secondly, the analogy of agriculture points to an hierarchic taxonomy in nature, which places humans at the apex of the natural order. The soil is cultivated in accordance with its nature as productive potential. Tending the soil is only intelligible insofar as it can be brought to yield its sustenance to a plant, specifically, plants directly or indirectly useful to man. But here we may notice that the current and “derivative” understanding of culture as cultivation of the mind presents us with a second, significantly distinct understanding of culture. On the original understanding of culture, the soil would be (or at least importantly include) the broader social milieu into which an individual is born: the environment of one’s family, tribe, city, or empire. This socio-political ‘soil’ could be more or less fertile, as judged by the conspicuously strong, healthy and beautiful plants

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which grew out of it, be they few or many. By contrast, on the “derivative” understanding of culture, the soil is the individual mind, which, again, could be more or less fertile.⁷ Growing out of this soil would be ideas or opinions, technical innovations and artistic creations. As we shall see in what follows, both Strauss and Nietzsche are concerned to address both understandings of culture, and their efforts are deployed to help realize the *telei* of both understandings: strong, healthy, beautiful individuals -- “cultured human beings”; and extraordinary ‘products’ of the mind, including understanding itself.

Thirdly, in and through this relating of culture and agriculture, Strauss subtly reminds his thoughtful readers of the strange fusion of ‘nature’ and ‘human artifice’ that both agriculture and culture imply. The products of agriculture are natural insofar as they grow naturally, and they are cultivated in accordance with the specific requirements of their growth; but they are planted deliberately, and their growth can be artificially facilitated -- indeed, even the plant itself can be engineered, amplifying or enhancing certain of its characteristic features, diminishing others. Thus, we are tacitly invited to consider analogous practices in the cultivation of human beings and their minds.

Fourthly, the plants’ growth is artificially enhanced precisely because nature is *not* simply bountiful. That is, agriculture is conceived as an aid to nature, which while essential, is not as generously forthcoming with its gifts as it could be given rational assistance. Similarly, the spontaneous production of exceptional individuals or creative efforts in primitive societies, while revealing of the higher possibilities of human nature, would presumably fall far short of what could be achieved through purposeful cultivation.

Furthermore, while humans may cultivate the soil “in accordance with its nature”,

⁷ “[S]tudents are only potential, but potential points beyond itself” Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p20.

they tend both it and the plants with their eyes firmly fixed on human utility -- which need not necessarily correspond to the natural *telos* of the plant cultivated. Are we to see that the same is the case with respect to the cultivation of the community, or the individual human mind? The aim of agriculture is the bountiful harvest and ultimately material prosperity. What is the aim of the cultivation of the human mind? Is that aim in accordance with the nature of the cultivated, the perfection of *its* nature? Or is it cultivated for the sustenance and profit of the cultivators, such as the state or nation, or some even higher reification (such as ‘Mankind’, or ‘The Future’)? One may say that Strauss answered ‘the former’ when laying down his definition in accordance with the “primary” meaning of culture. However, the emphasis on the individual human mind is a “derivative” meaning.

So, what do we learn about education, specifically *liberal* education, through this analogy with agriculture? Liberal education is cultivation. Cultivation is care and improvement in accordance with the nature of the thing cultivated and toward its *telos* or the full-realization of its natural end. Seen in that light, not all education is liberal, or liberating in the sense that it allows the thing to develop freely towards its end. Rather, as we have noted, cultivation may be directed towards utility and profit, and these may conflict with fulfilling the end of the thing’s own nature.⁸ If we reflect further upon Strauss’ use of the analogy of agriculture in the first paragraph of his essay, we recognize its kinship with the view Nietzsche sketches in the first section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*:

[Y]our educators can only be your liberators.... Culture is liberation, the removal of all the weeds, rubble and vermin that want to attack the tender

⁸ “A human being is said to be natural if he is guided by nature rather than by convention, or by inherited opinion, or by tradition, to say nothing of mere whims.” *What is Political Philosophy*, p27. As Bloom puts it, “No real teacher can doubt that his task is to assist his pupil to fulfill human nature against all the deforming forces of convention and prejudice.” *The Closing of the American Mind*, p20.

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buds of the plant, an outstreaming of light and warmth, the gentle rustling of nocturnal rain, it is imitation and worship of nature where nature is in her motherly and merciful mood, it is the perfecting of nature when it deflects her cruel and merciless assaults and turns them to good... (129-30/I.4).⁹

For Nietzsche, just as for Strauss, cultivation, liberation and education are all closely related, and are introduced through the analogy of agriculture. For Strauss, liberal education is cultivation. For Nietzsche culture is liberation, and one's educators are one's liberators.

Nietzsche's use of the agriculture-culture analogy resurfaces regularly in his essay. Apart from the repeated use of agricultural diction such as 'fruit', 'fruitful', 'fruition', 'root', 'stem', 'branch', 'seed', 'flower' and such, we would draw particular attention to two key returns to this motif of agriculture and the related theme of the relationship between nature and culture. In the second paragraph of the seventh section Nietzsche explains why agriculture is needed.

Nature wants always to be of universal utility, but it does not know how to find the best and most suitable means and instruments for this end: that is what it suffers from most, that is why nature is melancholy.... Nature seems to be bent on squandering; but it is squandering, not through a wanton luxuriousness, but through inexperience; it can be assumed that if nature were human it would never cease to be annoyed at itself and its ineptitude.... Nature is just as extravagant in the domain of culture as it is in that of planting and sowing. It achieves its aims in a broad and ponderous manner: and in doing so it sacrifices much too much energy.
(177/VII.2)

Humans make use of agriculture because, left to itself, "Nature is a bad economist: its expenditure is much larger than the income it procures". That is, for Nietzsche, just as

⁹ All citations of Nietzsche will be taken from *Schopenhauer as Educator* as it appears in *Untimely Meditations*, R.J. Hollingdale trans., (Cambridge University Press: 1997). I will cite the page number followed by the section number and paragraph in the section from which the quotation is drawn. For example, in this case the quotation is from pages 129 and 130, and appears in the fourth paragraph of the first section of the essay, thus: (129-30/I.4). Additionally, all italics will be Nietzsche's, and all underlining my own emphasis.

for Strauss, agriculture is conceived as an aid to nature, improving its efficiency, and easing its “melancholy”. But accompanying any departure from or interference with nature’s acting naturally is a correlative loss of naturally given ends guiding such departures or interference. Man’s will becomes the measure, by default if not intentionally. On the analogy between the soil and the human mind, it is easy to see that the germination of noble ideas can be hindered by purposeful cultivation in pursuit of profit and utility -- a *bountiful* as opposed to a *beautiful* harvest. But on the analogy between the soil and the regime or community (the socio-political environment), the threat to human excellence is equally striking. If what is sought is profit or empire, thus productive workers or state servants, and not the superior individual specimen as ends in themselves, one’s agricultural techniques will reflect that choice, and individual excellence will be jeopardized. Moreover, in turning away from human excellence as the aim of culture -- whatever this excellence substantially consists of -- we lose any standard guiding our departures from and interferences in the natural fulfillment of human nature.

Were the problems posed by this scenario not enough, Nietzsche compounds them by introducing the prospect that the species itself, and the limits and possibilities which inform it, could change. Whereas, given a fixed conception of Nature, the cultivation of minds and individuals could be guided by an understanding of human nature, the prospect that these very efforts shape human nature itself leaves us apparently without any orienting conception of the human telos to guide our efforts, particularly now that we are already so far removed from ‘natural man’.¹⁰

Nietzsche provides his readers some indication of his answer to these difficulties

¹⁰ In a distinctly Nietzschean remark, Strauss informs us that, “Man cannot be understood in his own light but only in the light of either the subhuman or the superhuman. Either man is the accidental product of a blind evolution, or else the process leading to man, culminating in man, is directed towards man.” *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p7.

in the fourth section of the essay: “I am concerned here with a species of man whose teleology extends somewhat beyond the welfare of a state, with philosophers, and with these only in relation to a world which is again fairly independent of the welfare of a state, that of culture” (148/IV.3) Similarly, in the sixth section we read:

We ought really to have no difficulty in seeing that, when a species has arrived at its limits and is about to go over into a higher species, the goal of its evolution lies, not in the mass of its exemplars and their well-being, let alone in those exemplars who happen to come last in point of time, but rather in those apparently scattered and chance existences which favourable conditions have here and there produced (162/VI.1).

While Strauss is far from explicit at the outset of his essay as to how he conceives the *telos* which properly guides our cultivational efforts, we will see that Strauss too views the philosopher as the ultimate aim of culture, be it “originally” or “derivatively” understood. Thus, for purposes of further exposition, we will presume this *telos* in our analysis of Strauss’ account of liberal, liberating education.

II The Educator as Farmer

Continuing with the analogy between agriculture and culture, Strauss informs us that “Just as the soil needs cultivators of the soil, the mind needs teachers. But teachers are not as easy to come by as farmers. The teachers themselves are pupils and must be pupils” (3/1). However, confronted with an untenable infinite regress, we recognize that there must be teachers who are not in turn pupils. Such original teachers Strauss identifies as “the greatest minds”, adding immediately that they are “extremely rare”. As to who these “greatest minds” are or could be, we are initially told only that, “We are not likely to meet any of them in any classroom. We are not likely to meet any of them anywhere. It is a piece of good luck if there is a single one alive in one’s time” (3/1).

Consequently, we have access to such rarest products of nature and culture, these original teachers, only through their writings. Strauss concludes the opening paragraph of ‘What is Liberal Education?’ as though he has derived a conclusion from a series of propositions: “Liberal education will then consist in studying with the proper care the great books which the greatest minds have left behind” (3/1). Yet this is a valid conclusion only if these greatest minds are the highest end product of nature and culture, and that in becoming their pupils by studying such great books “with the proper care”, one cultivates one’s own mind, thereby likening one’s own mind to such greatest minds.

We ought not to lose sight of the “primary” understanding of culture, however, as cultivation of the soil. From this vantage, the teacher-as-farmer’s responsibility includes promoting the fertility of the community-as-soil. The study of the great books, however, furthers this end as well. For if the great books provide one with access to true culture of the past, to past products of fertile soil, those great books could serve to ‘fertilize’ weak or depleted soil: directly, in the minds of their readers, and indirectly in the broader community in which such readers participate.¹¹

As we have already seen, in the opening section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche connects agriculture and education in much the same way Strauss has done, and remarks that “Your educators can only be your liberators” and “Culture is liberation”. By liberation, Nietzsche understands liberation from the “chains of fear and convention” (127/I.2) which keep one from becoming one’s own true self. But this presupposes that one ‘knows oneself’, knows what one essentially *is*. How is such knowledge to be gained? To borrow a phrase from Nietzsche’s later writings, how does one become what one is? Here Nietzsche suggests to his readers that the readiest available path by which

¹¹ In *The Closing of the American Mind*, after invoking the authority of Nietzsche, Bloom remarks, “The soil is ever thinner, and I doubt whether it can now sustain the taller growths” p51.

one can come to know oneself is to reflect on “one’s true educators and cultivators” (130/I.5). Thus, by way of example, Nietzsche sets out to reflect upon Arthur Schopenhauer as a means of his coming to know himself thereby demonstrating to his readers what such reflections can yield.

Nietzsche begins these reflections by informing his readers that it is through the written word that he was educated by Schopenhauer: “I am to describe what an event my first glance at Schopenhauer’s writings was for me...” (130/II.1). And he concludes this second section with the remark:

I sensed that in [Schopenhauer] I had discovered that educator and philosopher I had sought for so long. But I had discovered him only in the form of a book, and that was a great deficiency. So I strove all the harder to see through the book and to imagine the living man whose great testament I had to read and who promised to make his heirs only those who would and could be more than merely his readers: namely his sons and pupils. (136/II.8)

As we shall see, Nietzsche presents his readers with a Schopenhauer who was himself an original teacher in Strauss’ sense, a teacher who is not in turn a pupil, and whose writings provide one with the opportunity of liberating oneself, of educating oneself, of cultivating oneself. Moreover, in the intervening paragraphs, Nietzsche has, like Strauss, emphasized how rare such educators are, and why “It was thus truly roving through wishes to imagine I might discover a true philosopher as an educator” (133/II.4). Indeed, in the third section of his essay, Nietzsche even applies the metaphor of farmer directly to Schopenhauer, “[Schopenhauer’s] genius promised him the highest -- that there would be no deeper furrow than that which his ploughshare was digging in the ground of modern mankind” (142/III.5). Thus, farmer of the individual mind as well as of “modern mankind”, an original educator cultivating pupils through his writings,

Nietzsche's Schopenhauer appears as one of Strauss' extremely rare teachers who are not in turn pupils.¹² Moreover, Nietzsche's account of the transformative impact that Schopenhauer had on him provides a substantial indication of how such teachers accomplish the effects that both Nietzsche and Strauss attribute to them.

III Reading the Great Books

Having identified liberal education as consisting in, "studying with the proper care the great books which the greatest minds have left behind -- a study in which the more experienced pupils assist the less experienced pupils, including the beginners" (3/1), Strauss concedes the difficulty of some aspect of what he has just said, though it is not immediately clear which. "This is not an easy task, as would appear if we were to consider the formula which I have just mentioned" (3/2). What is not an easy task? Liberal education as a whole? Or some aspect of it, e.g., what studying great books consists of? Or identifying what the great books are? Assisting the less experienced, the beginners?¹³ Or does he intend all of these? Upon reflection it is not surprising that this formula "requires a long commentary. Many lives have been spent and may still be spent in writing such commentaries" (3/2). Strauss proceeds to spotlight a particular difficulty. "For instance, what is meant by the remark that the great books should be studied 'with the proper care'? At present I mention only one difficulty which is obvious to everyone

¹² For both Strauss and Nietzsche, both careful readers of Plato, the farmer is the natural symbolic stand-in for the educator, just as agriculture is for education generally.

¹³ In one of his accounts of the esoteric-exoteric distinction, Strauss raises the question, "does a continuous way lead from the extremely inattentive reader to the extremely attentive reader, or is the way between the two extremes interrupted by a chasm?... according to Plato, philosophy presupposes a real conversion, i.e., a total break with the attitude of the beginner: the beginner is the man who has not yet for one moment left the cave... whereas the philosopher is the man who has left the cave.... The difference between the beginner and the philosopher (for the perfectly trained student of Plato is no one else but the genuine philosopher) is a difference not of degree but of kind." (p68, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*). Strauss proceeds to discuss the distinction between the beginner and the philosopher with respect to the difference between the morality of the beginner and the morality of the philosopher -- a difference which he tells us corresponds to the difference between the exoteric and esoteric teachings.

among you: the greatest minds do not all tell us the same things regarding the most important themes” (3/2). Discord in the community of the greatest minds re-emerges later in Strauss’ essay as a “difficulty so great that it seems to condemn liberal education as an absurdity” (7/7). What is Strauss talking about?

Nietzsche begins the second section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, mentioning in connection with his discovery of Schopenhauer’s writings, “the terrible effort and duty of educating myself” (130/II.1), and shortly thereafter remarks upon “the difficulty of the task of educating a man to be a man” (131/II.2). These remarks emerge from Nietzsche reminiscing over his youthful hope that “I would discover a philosopher to educate me” (130/II.1). So, as we have seen, both Strauss and Nietzsche stress the rarity of such greatest minds. And both Strauss and Nietzsche, using similar language, draw their readers’ attentions to the difficulties that emerge from having to educate oneself through books. In Strauss’ second paragraph, and Nietzsche’s second section, both men discuss, albeit briefly and obliquely, this matter of reading the great books.

Nietzsche practically begins his remarks on his encounter with Schopenhauer’s writings with the statement, “I understand him as though it were for me he had written” (133/II.6). But shortly thereafter Nietzsche assures us that Schopenhauer “writes for himself” (134/II.6). May we thus conclude that Nietzsche understands Schopenhauer as Schopenhauer understood himself? This is precisely, to the word, Strauss’ oft repeated interpretive criteria.¹⁴ This is how Strauss reads and teaches others to read.

Strauss’ brief essay says virtually nothing about what qualities distinguish truly great books, however. With respect to this issue, recognizing the relation of Strauss’ essay to Nietzsche’s far more expansive ‘meditation’ is particularly helpful, for Nietzsche speaks at length about the special qualities of such writing, beginning with

¹⁴ See, e.g., *What is Political Philosophy?*, p66.

honesty. Schopenhauer is, Nietzsche informs us, exceedingly honest. He refuses even the “pleasant sociable deception which almost every conversation entails and which writers imitate almost subconsciously” (134/II.6). Even less does he employ rhetoric. Here Nietzsche opts for quoting Schopenhauer: “‘a philosopher must be very honest not to call poetry or rhetoric to his aid’” (135/II.6). Nietzsche then comments on the quotation: “That there is something called honesty and that it is even a virtue belongs, I know, in the age of public opinion to the private opinions that are forbidden; and thus I shall not be praising Schopenhauer but only characterizing him if I repeat: he is honest even as a writer, and so few writers are honest that one ought really to distrust anyone who writes.” The reflexivity of this last observation, paired with Nietzsche’s supposed declining to praise Schopenhauer, surely indicates to Nietzsche’s careful readers that, while Schopenhauer may refuse to call rhetoric to his aid, Nietzsche may not similarly abstain, and (moreover) may in fact have reservations about Schopenhauer’s refusal as well (supposing it to be so).¹⁵ Notice that later in *Schopenhauer as Educator* Nietzsche remarks that Schopenhauer’s works were almost totally bereft of popular effect (178-9/VII.2). Also notice that Nietzsche shifts, almost immediately, from a discussion of honesty in writing to the issue of morality. Morality, we learn, is taught by example, in the outwardly visible deeds of the educating philosopher, and “not merely in his books” (137/III.1). Nietzsche repeats here his warning regarding the attempt to cull a moral example from reading books. The philosophers of Greece taught morality in deed, “rather than by what they said, let alone what they wrote” (137/III.1). Still, a book *is* a deed of sorts, and thus, by never forgetting its dual character as both speech and deed, one can

¹⁵ Nietzsche focuses attention on three qualities evidenced in Schopenhauer: honesty, cheerfulness, and steadfastness. Given the obvious paradox in attributing cheerfulness to Schopenhauer (popularly, and thus possibly erroneously, caricatured as giving voice to a bleak and melancholic pessimism), we may be brought to wonder about the other qualities Nietzsche attributes to his philosopher as educator. As for his honesty, consider the revelation that he does use rhetoric, or at least “rhetorical instruments” (182/VII.5).

discern something of an indication of the philosopher's private opinions.

Such skeptical reading, distrusting the frankness, if not the honesty of the philosophers who write, is the hallmark of Strauss' hermeneutic approach. And while we cannot but suggest that Strauss acquired such an approach to reading from Nietzsche, we can confidently assert that both Strauss and Nietzsche focus their readers' attentions on the peculiar difficulties of encountering philosophers -- or more generally, the greatest minds -- in books. For if "one ought really to distrust anyone who writes", then "studying with the proper care the great books" will not be easy, and perhaps will require "a long commentary" and certainly no small assistance from "the more experienced pupils".¹⁶

In spite of these similarities of approach, structure, and subject matter, Strauss does seem directly to contradict Nietzsche in "mentioning" a difficulty "which is obvious to everyone of you: the greatest minds do not all tell us the same things regarding the most important themes; the community of the greatest minds is rent by discord and even various kinds of discord" (3-4/2). By contrast, in the third section of his essay Nietzsche remarks that, with respect to the question of the worth of existence, Empedocles and all the great philosophers of antiquity "are all saying the same thing" (145/III.8). We must, however, provisionally bracket this crucial apparent discrepancy between Strauss and Nietzsche on the history of philosophy, and make but three brief remarks. Firstly, we must notice that Nietzsche implicitly concedes that the ancients answered the question of the value of existence differently than do the moderns. He follows his assertion of the

¹⁶ Here it is helpful to bear in mind Strauss' numerous treatments of the exoteric-esoteric distinction in reading and writing. In particular his book length study *Persecution and Art of Writing*, and his two other essays explicitly devoted to the subject, 'On a Forgotten Kind of Writing' in *What is Political Philosophy?*, and 'Exoteric Teaching' in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*. Of particular pertinence here: "[W]hereas the exoteric teaching is meant to be accessible to every reader, the esoteric teaching discloses itself only to very careful and well-trained readers after long and concentrated study" (p222, *What is Political Philosophy?*).

univocity of the ancients with two remarks separating the ancients from the moderns, which must count as a “kind of discord”. As for Strauss, the dispute between the ancients and the moderns is so central to his explicit understanding of the Western tradition that it appears in the very title of the collection of essays introduced by the essay currently under review; *ancient* ‘liberalism’ is to be distinguished from *modern*. Secondly, we note that while discord among the greatest minds seems plausible, and almost undeniable with respect to any number of particular questions, it cannot be regarded as straightforwardly true with respect to this particular question, ‘What is Liberal Education?’ That is, the greatest minds all implicitly concur that being among the community of the greatest minds, or alternatively, becoming a teacher who is not in turn a pupil, is the goal of their own efforts.¹⁷ Finally, we note that Schopenhauer, while historically a modern, is depicted by Nietzsche as having successfully recreated the conditions within himself to come to the same answer as Empedocles. ‘We moderns’, in particular “modern philosophers” (as distinct from the ancients), are disturbed by an internal struggle “between the reformer of life and the philosopher, that is to say the judge of life” (145/III.8). Tempted, if not obliged, to be not only judges of the value of life, but reformers of life, they will “always suffer from an unfulfilled desire” (145/III.8) to be shown the kind of healthy, cultivated life which the Greeks lived. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer is described as transfiguring himself to the point where he too could come to “the answer of Empedocles”. As we shall see, Strauss is similarly encouraging his readers to attempt to recreate the conditions for an original understanding of philosophy in themselves. Moreover, later in his essay, when Strauss takes up the disagreement

¹⁷ Moreover, that leaving books behind to assist the less experienced pupils, including beginners, is common to them. Why they do so is perhaps debatable, but *that* they do is not. This, we will argue, is Strauss’ understanding of the essential difference between the Socratic and the Platonic approach to liberal education.

among the greatest minds more fully, he places great emphasis on our obligation to become judges. Nietzsche characterizes Schopenhauer's successful attempt to recreate an antique attitude towards philosophy within himself as the task of becoming a just judge (146/III.9).

IV Cultural Pluralism and Parochialism

In focusing on the difficulty presented by the apparent disagreement among the greatest minds, Strauss concludes that liberal education therefore “cannot be simply indoctrination.” This implies, however, that ‘dogmatic’, or ‘doctrinaire’ is the antithesis to ‘liberal’ as Strauss is here using the word, since we are all aware of educations which are indoctrinary, including some, like technical training, that are rightfully so. Liberal education, as Strauss intends it, thus emerges as a liberation from the dogmas and parochial doctrines of one’s own age and cultural milieu.

Returning to his original definition of liberal education, Strauss now raises “yet another difficulty”; this one having to do with culture and parochialism. “By limiting ourselves to Western culture, do we not condemn liberal education to a kind of parochialism, and is not parochialism incompatible with the liberalism, the generosity, the openmindedness, of liberal education?” (4/2). Strauss has a clear response to this objection, one which emerges later in the essay, but he first chooses to dwell on the question, drawing out the apparent conflict between his use of culture as *singulare tantum*, and contemporary cultural pluralism.

Nietzsche practically began his essay by holding forth the prospect of a liberating education. The “youthful soul” which hears the call to ‘Be yourself!’ “trembles when he hears it; for the idea of its liberation gives it a presentiment of the measure of happiness

allotted to it from all eternity". This happiness, however, is unattainable so long as the youthful soul "lies fettered by the chains of fear and convention" (127/I.1-2). In expanding on these "chains", Nietzsche warns his readers of the dangers of a simple-minded parochialism:

Why go on clinging to this clod of earth, this way of life, why pay heed to what your neighbor says? It is so parochial to bind oneself to views which are no longer binding even a couple of hundred miles away. Orient and Occident are chalk lines drawn before us to fool our timidity. I will make an attempt to attain freedom, the youthful soul says to itself; and is it to be hindered in this by the fact that two nations happen to hate and fight one another, or that two continents are separated by an ocean, or that all around it a religion is taught which did not yet exist a couple of thousand years ago. (128-9/I.3)

As Strauss will put it later in the essay, "It is merely an unfortunate necessity which prevents us from listening to the greatest minds of India and of China: we do not understand their languages, and we cannot learn all languages" (7/6). One would hardly say that particular linguistic differences are insurmountable obstacles! Rather, to the extent we are moved to "listen to the greatest minds of India and of China", we may learn their languages, and come to share the view Nietzsche attributes to Schopenhauer: that "its acquaintance with Indian philosophy [is] the greatest advantage our century possessed over all others" (192/VIII.10). Still, Strauss' observation remains valid: no one can learn all languages, much less read everything written therein, to say nothing of reading them "with the proper care". And yet, whatever else it entails, carefully reading the books of the greatest minds, wherever they originate, surely involves overcoming any parochial narrowness. Thus, far from such overcoming necessitating an "acquaintance with Indian philosophy" or the greatest minds of the Orient, rather such an overcoming is prerequisite to these greatest minds being profitably read. The main difficulty, however,

resides in Strauss' identifying liberal education as "education in culture", which presumes that to be a single clear goal.¹⁸

Strauss raises the large and most significant question posed by the possibility of a plurality of cultures only then to conceal it with a *reductio ad absurdum* presentation of the simple-minded social scientist's response to this difficulty. Attempting to expand a dinner napkin into a circus tent, the social scientist simply includes any and all group conduct under the name 'culture'. Strauss likens the relationship between the "present-day usage" and "the original meaning" of 'culture', to someone calling a garden 'cultivated' that was randomly strewn with empty tin cans, whiskey bottles and discarded paper (4/2). We are invited to reflect on this image in light the agricultural understanding of culture previously introduced. Culture there was said to be "the cultivation of the soil and its products, taking care of the soil, improving the soil in accordance with its nature" (3/1). Needless to say, refuse and junk strewn over a yard does not contribute to "the cultivation of the soil and its products". Rather, such litter would be the first thing removed by any gardener serious about the health and beauty of the plants he intends to cultivate, even before pulling out the weeds, tilling, and fertilizing.

Interestingly, Nietzsche employs a similar image in his essay. He likens the men he lives among to a field over which is strewn fragments of sculpture (163/VI.3). It would seem that Strauss sees the situation today as in certain respects even more degenerate than in Nietzsche's time. In place of the shattered fragments of a once beautiful (and beautifying) tradition which called out to be reassembled and made whole again, now lies the once useful remains from some pleasant but now forgotten experience which calls out to be cleared away and disposed of properly. The central point, however, is the same:

¹⁸ In the Introduction to *The City and Man*, Strauss remarks, "[C]ulture' originally and naively meant the culture of the mind, the derivative and reflective notion of 'culture' necessarily implies that there is a variety of equally high cultures" (p2).

good agriculture removes “all the weeds, rubble, and vermin that want to attack the tender buds of the plant”.

The recognition of an indefinite plurality of ‘cultures’ in the name of tolerance and open-mindedness culminates in what Nietzsche and Strauss would consider an oxymoron: ‘cultural relativism’. The very idea is utterly anathematic to philosophy as Strauss defines it later in the essay: “Philosophy is quest for wisdom or quest for knowledge regarding the most important, the highest, or the most comprehensive things”. Firstly, cultural relativism denies that there is any trans-cultural knowledge about such highest things. Philosophy thus becomes utterly futile. Secondly, it vitiates the motivation for trying to answer the pressing question facing individuals of all cultures: namely, what is the right way to live. For one is not apt to exert effort to answer a question one has already dismissed as unanswerable or always already answered equally well. Politically speaking, such a position (as taught in public schools for instance), is perhaps even more pernicious. Not only does it undermine any and all allegiance among citizens to their own polity, it makes of one’s culture-defining rituals and practices (*nomoi*) merely one set among many, with no reasonable grounds for preference. It thus practically culminates either in fanatical commitment or lethargic indifference, while rendering impossible the provision of reasonable grounds for favoring indifferent tolerance to tyrannical intolerance.

Nietzsche diagnoses the modern tendency to superficiality and indifference as a symptom of a misemployment, or misappropriation, of culture. Recall that Nietzsche, in warning against parochialism, invoked the opposition of Occident and Orient. Here, however, Nietzsche employs the opposition between Occident and Orient to point to the clashing and contrary seasonings modern men add to themselves to conceal their “*ugly or*

boring content":

They have themselves served up by their artists as sharp and pungent repasts; they soak themselves in all the spices of the Orient and the Occident, and to be sure! they now smell very interesting, smelling as they do of all the Orient and the Occident. Now they are suitably prepared for satisfying every taste; and everyone shall have something, whether his inclination be for the fresh-smelling or foul-smelling, for the sublimated or for peasant coarseness, for the Greek or the Chinese, for tragedies or for dramatized lewdness. (166/VI.7)

Rather than simply promoting generosity, open-mindedness, and tolerance, cultural pluralism encourages a sort of superficial dabbling in other cultures accompanied by a total disavowal of any sense for culture as a coherent whole -- a cultivation in light of a single clear purpose. As regards the impact of such a culture-less 'culture' on philosophy, Nietzsche remarks, continuing with the culinary metaphor, that attempts are made to employ even Schopenhauer "as an exotic and stimulating spice, as it were a kind of metaphysical pepper." For Nietzsche, just as for Strauss, the culmination of a multicultural education is utter indifference to culture. One loses the ability to distinguish a garden from a dump, the fragrant from the reeking.

In contrast to this supposed myriad of cultures, both Strauss and Nietzsche employ 'culture' in the singular throughout their essays, while implicitly claiming to have shed their own parochial narrowness, as manifest in their recognition of the potential value of both East and West. This is unproblematic if there is a plurality of modes of cultivation or acculturations, all of which are nonetheless directed toward, and culminate in the same single form of human excellence. But the possibility of a genuine plurality of forms of human excellence, hence of cultures, is not refuted by exposing the absurdity of treating as a culture "any pattern of conduct common to any human group", be it suburban housewives or ghetto gangs. At the level of the community, it suffices to

mention Athens and Sparta: the respective ‘flowers’ of these different ‘soils’ differ significantly; and the choice of which -- if either -- is better is far from clear. At the level of the individual, we may recall that while there is a plurality of philosophers (or “greatest minds”), their “community” is, as we have seen, “rent by discord and even by various kinds of discord” (4/2).

In sum, both authors mock the superficiality of contemporary cultural pluralism; and through employing ‘culture’ as a *singulare tantum*, both conceal the difficulties that arise from the possibility of there being a legitimate plurality of cultures. Both recognize that, at the very least, with respect to East and West, Orient and Occident, there may be alternative cultural approaches. Yet both emphatically point to there being a single human excellence.

V Modern Democracy and Liberal Education

At this point, Strauss declares “we have lost our way somehow”, and recommends making “a fresh start by raising the question: what can liberal education mean here and now?” (4/3). Of course, anyone can see that this “we” must not be merely authorial, for Strauss has already used the first person singular in the second paragraph. This “we” is Strauss’ appeal to the denizens of “Western culture” generally; indeed, the logic of his critique implies that he includes himself only out of politeness. After all, it is contemporary Western social scientists who have arrived at this bizarre ‘littered-yard’ understanding of culture, an understanding Strauss clearly does not share. Here, then, we get an inkling of what Strauss is *doing* in this essay, in and through what he is saying. Strauss is showing his readers the relationship between liberal education and culture -- and by implication liberal education and democracy -- by himself acting as a more experienced

pupil assisting the less experienced pupils in the rediscovery of the foundational understanding of the greatest minds. To return to the analogy between agriculture and culture, one can only turn a littered yard into a garden through “the removal of all the weeds, rubble and vermin” that inhibit the growth of the desired plants. At the level of the mind, this consists in clearing away the vulgar assumptions and prejudices (be they rooted or otherwise) of one’s time and place. At the level of the community, the task of a well-ordered regime is to clear the environment -- social, intellectual, moral, and material -- of what is inimical to the realization of human excellence. However, one can ‘clean up’ the community’s garden only through a cleaning up of the individual mental gardens of those who will themselves work for the community’s garden. That is, Strauss cannot speak to ‘Western culture’ and advise ‘it’ to change its self-understanding; rather, he must work through individuals interested primarily in cultivating themselves -- a significant part of which consists in refining their very conception of culture and education.

In so doing, however, Strauss appears to have dropped the question of what liberal education is simply, in favor of what it can mean “here and now”. But Strauss and Nietzsche seem to concur that a preoccupation with one’s own temporal and geographic region is antithetical to the spirit of a truly liberating education. Recall that Strauss had earlier remarked that “liberal education cannot be simply indoctrination” (4/2), which is *the education of the ‘here and now’*. Nietzsche too raises the question of whether, and in what manner, it is an advantage to become familiar with one’s own age: “I have now to deal with something extremely comprehensible, namely to explain how through Schopenhauer we are all *able* to educate ourselves *against* our age -- because through him we possess the advantage of really *knowing* this age. Supposing, that is, that it *is* an advantage!” (146/IV.1). Why, we may ask, do Strauss and Nietzsche both draw their

readers' attentions to the problematic and apparently unphilosophic goal of understanding the 'here and now'?¹⁹

The 'second beginning' to Strauss' essay, signaled by his proposing we make a "fresh start", seems topical and temporally focused. It begins with an emphasis on letters, literacy and modern democracy. "Every voter knows modern democracy stands or falls by literacy." This contemporary understanding of the dependency of modern democracy is set up beside another, older understanding. "It was once said that democracy is the regime that stands or falls by virtue". Strauss implies that modern democracy, as opposed to democracy simply or originally, has replaced its foundation in virtue with one based in literacy, at least insofar as what "every voter knows" and what "was once said" represent some truth regarding modern democracy and democracy simply. On the original understanding of democracy, all or most adults are to be "men of virtue", and thus must be wise, or at least "have developed their reason to a high degree" (4/3).²⁰ Strauss tells us that doubts emerged as to the possibility of this effort to found a universal aristocracy in a democracy. "As one of the two greatest minds among the theorists of democracy put it, 'If there were a people consisting of gods, it would rule itself democratically. A government of such perfection is not suitable for human beings'"(5.3).²¹

Strauss proceeds to explore the prevalent though "extreme view" held among contemporary political scientists regarding this juxtaposition between the ideal of

¹⁹ Consider, e.g., Strauss' observation in 'What is Political Philosophy?': "It is only when the Here and Now ceases to be the center of reference that a philosophic or a scientific approach to politics can emerge" p16.

²⁰ To illustrate a similar point, Strauss elsewhere quotes Thomas Jefferson's letter to John Adams (October 28, 1813), "That form of government is the best, which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of [the] natural aristoi into offices of the government" *What is Political Philosophy*, p86.

²¹ Strauss is quoting Rousseau's concluding sentence of the chapter "On Democracy" in *On the Social Contract*.

democracy and “democracy as it is”.²² On this supposedly scientific view, the ideal of democracy was “sheer delusion”; “the only thing that matters is the behavior of democracies and men in democracies” (5.4).²³ And the behavior manifested in democracies, indeed apparently extolled as virtuous, is “electoral apathy, viz., lack of public spirit” (5.4). Laziness, in short, is what prevents the many from working towards virtue, from realizing the ideal of democracy, and this gives modern democracy its specific character. Similarly, Nietzsche asks at the outset of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, “What is it that constrains the individual to fear his neighbor, to think and act like a member of a herd, and to have no joy in himself?” And Nietzsche (or his traveler) answers, “it is indolence, inertia, in short that tendency to laziness” (127/I.1). Democracy so understood is not mass rule -- some sort of ‘elite’ actually rules -- but rather, mass culture.²⁴ Mass culture, in turn, is cheap and requires very little effort, moral or intellectual, to appropriate. It is ‘culture’ for the lazy. But in order for this “soft mass culture” to continue to be protected by the “hard shell” of democracy, qualities of a different kind are required, qualities that are not purposefully nurtured or cultivated in a mass culture. Thus Strauss seems to indicate that the cultivation of these qualities is in the interest both of the many wedded to their mass culture, and of the few who will benefit personally from such an education. Strauss specifies four types of qualities as requisite: “qualities of dedication, of concentration, of breadth, and of depth.” Despite the formality of these specifications, Strauss suggests, “Thus we understand most easily

²² As Strauss puts it in the Introduction to *Philosophy and Law*: “The premises about which the present is at one with the Age of Enlightenment have now become so self-evident that it is only or chiefly the opposition between the Enlightenment and the present that tends to be remarked and taken seriously” (p22, *Philosophy and Law*).

²³ “From this point of view, the guiding theme of social science in this age and in this country will be democracy, or, more precisely, liberal democracy, especially in its American form” (p5-6, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*).

²⁴ “The sovereign consists of the individuals who are in no way responsible, who can in no way be held responsible: the irresponsible individual. This was not simply the original notion of liberal democracy” (p48, ‘The Crisis of our Time’).

what liberal education means here and now" (5/4).

In a digression about the then recent Frenchification of German culture,²⁵

Nietzsche employs a similar hard and soft juxtaposition.

And if it is unfortunately true that a good proportion of the German nation is only too willing to be moulded and kneaded into shape in this fashion, then one has to reiterate until the words are heeded: it no longer dwells in you, that ancient German nature which, though hard, austere and full of resistance, is so as the most precious of materials, upon which only the greatest of sculptors is permitted to work because they alone are worthy of it. What you have in you, on the contrary, is soft pulpy matter...

Following Strauss' claim that we may now understand what liberal education means here and now, we are presented with four roles, or functions for liberal education within the modern democratic setting. "Liberal education is the counterpoison to mass culture.... Liberal education is the ladder by which we try to ascend from mass democracy to democracy as originally meant. Liberal education is the necessary endeavor to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society. Liberal education reminds those members of a mass democracy who have ears to hear of human greatness." This fourth paragraph thus tacitly invites us to consider whether we do in fact understand "what liberal education means here and now." It would seem that on Strauss' account, by becoming aware of the tendency of democracy, perhaps especially modern liberal democracy, towards mass culture and laziness, we are obliged to work towards slowing, if not reversing, such decline. Elsewhere, after having noted modern democracy's "creeping conformism and the ever-increasing invasion of privacy which it fosters", Strauss

²⁵ Incidentally, in the Introduction to *Natural Right and History* Strauss remarks (regarding the 'Germanization' of America which occurred following the Second World War), that "It would not be the first time that a nation defeated on the battlefield and, as it were, annihilated as a political being, had deprived its conquerors of the most sublime fruit of victory by imposing on them the yoke of its own thought" (p2). Strauss surely must have Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator* in mind when penning those words, for there we read: "Since the late war with France there have been many changes in Germany.... The war was for many their first visit to the more elegant half of the world; how unprejudiced the victor now appears when he does not disdain to acquire a little culture from the vanquished!" (p166). Bloom then borrows Strauss' observation and uses it in *Closing of the American Mind* (p152).

remarks, ‘Now to the extent to which democracy is aware of these dangers, to the same extent it sees itself as compelled to think of elevating its level and its possibilities by a return to the classics’ notion of education’.²⁶

Strauss’ explanation of why an answer to the timeless question of ‘What is Liberal Education?’ necessarily becomes a question of what liberal education means “here and now” parallels Nietzsche’s answer. The advantage one gets from understanding one’s age is an awareness of what is inimical to the fulfillment of one’s nature, which is the pressing question which Nietzsche seeks to answer through his consideration of Schopenhauer.²⁷ In the opening section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche (like Strauss) uses the metaphor of the ladder:

Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it?... Compare these objects with one another, see... how they constitute a stepladder upon which you have clambered up to yourself as you are now; for your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be. (129/I.4)

Notably, in the fourth section of Nietzsche’s essay, he too turns his gaze to the present, and examines “how through Schopenhauer we are all *able* to educate ourselves *against our age*” (146/IV.1). At the outset of Nietzsche’s own digression into his contemporary state of affairs, he too focuses on the declining literacy which emerged out of the modern turn. “I find it amusing to reflect on the idea that mankind may sometime soon grow tired of reading and that writers will do so too...” (146-7/IV.1). Strauss himself had amusedly noted (in the fourth paragraph) that in spite of modern democracy’s reliance on literacy, the “salt of modern democracy are those citizens who

²⁶ *What is Political Philosophy?*, p38. It is for this reason that “the friend of liberal democracy is not its flatterer” (*Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p6 and *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p24).

²⁷ Interestingly, Nietzsche identifies those which worked against Schopenhauer coming to be, as the same factors which led to Schopenhauer not being read.

read nothing but the sports page and the comic section” (5/4). That is, mankind *has* grown tired of reading, just as Nietzsche had ‘amusedly’ anticipated. What remedy, then, can be sought if this is an accurate portrait of modern democracy and mass culture? What does the founding of an aristocracy in democratic mass society mean?²⁸

VI Rousseauian Man and Modern Democracy

Strauss’ timely meditation is interrupted in the fifth paragraph by an anonymous Rousseauian who asks five questions.

Can we not turn our backs on modern society? Can we not return to nature, to the life of preliterate tribes? Are we not crushed, nauseated, degraded by the mass of printed material, the graveyards of so many beautiful and majestic forests? It is not sufficient to say that this is mere romanticism, that we today cannot return to nature: may not coming generations, after a man-wrought cataclysm, be compelled to live in preliterate tribes? Will our thoughts concerning thermonuclear wars not be affected by such prospects? (5)

Strauss understands this longing to return to nature in light of “the horrors of mass culture” -- not, that is, in the light of the horrors of thermonuclear war -- but he denies the

²⁸ In his important ‘Three Waves of Modernity’ essay, Strauss describes Nietzsche’s politics of the future: “For Nietzsche all genuinely human life, every high culture has necessarily a hierarchic or aristocratic character; the highest culture of the future must be in accordance with the natural order of rank among men which Nietzsche, in principle, understands along Platonic lines” (p97, *Political Philosophy*). Strauss’ source for this characterization of Nietzsche’s politics may be *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 257: “Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society -- and so it will always be: a society which believes in a long ladder of orders of rank and differences of worth between man and man...”. Nor is there a necessary contradiction between Strauss’ active work to defend the American liberal regime against its critics, and his efforts to ‘aristocratize’ modern democracy. On the one hand, “we are not permitted to be flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy” (*Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p24); and on the other, Strauss repeatedly characterizes the goal or direction of modern politics as the universal homogeneous state, or the world state, and he characterizes Nietzsche’s political ambition as aiming at a “planetary aristocracy” (see *What is Political Philosophy?*, p54). If the universal homogeneous state were to come about, Strauss’ vision of liberal education as “the necessary endeavor to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society” would be the means to this Nietzschean end!

viability of such a solution.²⁹ This unexpected apparent digression into the character of a possible illiterate society reveals that, at best, such a society would be “ruled by age-old ancestral custom which it traces to original founders, gods, or sons of gods or pupils of gods”.³⁰ However, because the later heirs of such a society could be assured of its remaining true to the spirit of its founding only by means of letters, Strauss concludes that the best to be hoped for from a return to a more primitive existence could be guaranteed only by means of letters and literacy, and thus such a ‘Rousseauean’ wish is self-contradictory. We are thus “compelled to live with books.”

We must pause, however, and reflect on what purpose this digression serves. In the first instance, it is clearly intended to exclude a return to some pre-political ‘state of nature’ as a viable response to modern democracy and mass culture, even were such an eventuality to be imposed on man in the wake of a nuclear apocalypse. And yet Strauss uses this digression to adduce the conclusion that letters, particularly the study of great books, is essential here and now. He thus implicitly likens present society to an illiterate society, one which can be made into the best possible only through direct contact with its divine, or semi-divine founders: through the study of the greatest books. Recall the disjunction between democracy as originally meant -- the regime founded in virtue -- and democracy as it has come to be -- the regime dependent on literacy. Recall also the Rousseau quotation, “If there were a people consisting of gods...”. Thus, in order to

²⁹ That Strauss finds the horrors of mass culture more pressing and threatening than the horrors of thermonuclear war mirrors his attitude towards Communism. Consider his remark in ‘Political Philosophy and History’ that, “even if we could know with certainty that the future order is to be, say, a communist world society, we should not know more than that the communist world society is the only alternative to the destruction of modern civilization, and we should still have to wonder which alternative is preferable” (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p69). Nevertheless, as Strauss reminds his readers in the essay preceding the one cited above, there is an alternative to communist world society: “[Nietzsche] opposed the possibility of a planetary aristocracy to the alleged necessity of a universal classless and stateless society” (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p54).

³⁰ Alternatively, “The ancestors are superior, and therefore the ancestors must be understood, if this notion is fully thought through, as gods, sons of gods, or pupils of gods” (*Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p254, Cf., *What is Political Philosophy?*, p29).

realize the ideal of democracy, the regime of virtue, we are compelled to return to the founders of democracy. We are hindered from doing so, however, to the extent that we have become illiterate. The man-wrought cataclysm has, in effect, already come to pass, and we have lost contact with the semi-divine founders of our traditions, both political and philosophic. We are no longer aware of whether significant, even radical modifications have been made to the intention of the founders. Recall the earlier use of “pupils” in the essay, where Strauss concluded that in order to avoid an infinite regress, there must have been teachers who were not in turn pupils, and that liberal education consists in the study of the works of these foundational teachers with the help of the more experienced pupils. Strauss thus invites us to place the greatest minds, those capable not only of following laws, but of framing laws,³¹ in the position of gods or demi-gods, for he is explicit that “they are not in turn pupils”, which must even preclude their being “pupils of gods”.³²

What we may conclude from these remarks is that Strauss is employing a carefully wrought analogy between politics and liberal education, particularly with respect to the problem of history, whereby the spirit of the founding principles of both a polity and liberal education must be continually rediscovered and made new, re-presented in the present, in order that such principles not disappear into the darkness of the past for those not in direct contact with the founders. Without each generation making anew the teachings of the founders -- be it of a polity or of liberal education -- the late heirs of these teachings are ignorant as to whether their fathers or grandfathers have deviated from or defaced the original divine message. However, in implicitly likening contemporary democracy and the study of such democracy to an illiterate society that has lost the very

³¹ p13, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*.

³² In this connection it is helpful to note that Strauss identifies the political philosopher in possession of an ‘architectonic’ political science as “the teacher of legislators” (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p84).

means by which it could commune with its founders -- that has “lost its way somehow” -

- Strauss is effectively arguing that the man-wrought cataclysm forcing us into the position of an illiterate society has already occurred. The dark ages have descended.

Just as Strauss’s Rousseauian questioned whether we weren’t “nauseated... by the mass of printed material, the graveyards of so many beautiful and majestic forests” (5/5), so Nietzsche asks, “And if it is true that the forests are going to get thinner and thinner, may the time not come one day when the libraries should be used for timber, straw and brushwood?” (147/IV.1). As a consequence, both Strauss and Nietzsche regard the present as a kind of “*saeculum obscurum*”. Just as Strauss considers the threat of a “man-wrought cataclysm” returning us to a state of nature (5/5), so Nietzsche warns that “For a century we have been preparing for absolutely fundamental convulsions...” (149/IV.5). The cataclysm Nietzsche anticipates is “absolutely unavoidable, and it will be the atomistic revolution: but what are the smallest indivisible basic constituents of human society?” (150/IV.5).³³ And just as Strauss’ reflections on mass democracy and mass culture are interrupted by an anonymous Rousseauian, Nietzsche follows his characterization of the modern cultural decline and decay with the first of three “images of man” (150/IV.7) conceived to inspire modern men to transfigure their lives: the man of Rousseau and his “gospel of nature” (151/IV.8). “Oppressed and half-crushed by arrogant upper-classes and merciless wealth, ruined by priests and bad education and rendered contemptible to himself by ludicrous customs, man cries in his distress to ‘holy

³³ This question is, of course, central to modern contractarian political philosophy from Hobbes to Rousseau. Moreover, Strauss characterizes Rousseau’s response to the perceived crisis of modernity as culminating in the solitary dreamer on the fringes of political society, or the return to nature on the part of the few suited for it (p53, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p93, *Political Philosophy*, p254, 294, *Natural Right and History*). Interestingly, Hobbes’ portrait of the state of nature is criticized by Rousseau as having invested pre-political man with passions and faculties he could only have acquired in political society (Second Discourse I(35)). Nonetheless, both Hobbes and Rousseau subtly indicate that the solitary pre-political individual may never have been, and that, as Aristotle had affirmed, the family is the smallest unit of society. If this is the case, familial opposition to philosophic education will not cease even after a return to the state of nature.

nature' ...". Such a violently moved individual³⁴ longs to cast off all his artificial adornments, even his arts and sciences.³⁵ He affirms that ““Only nature is good, only the natural is human”” (151/IV.7).

As we have seen, Strauss suggests that in certain respects we are in the situation of this man of Rousseau. The atomistic revolution has reduced modern man to a second state of nature.³⁶ Furthermore, though we have “grown tired of reading”, we continue to consume our forests in the production of books. “We have lost all simply authoritative traditions in which we could trust”, and “each of us here is compelled to find his own bearings by his own powers”. Thus, illiterate and alone, modern man may look to uncultivated nature for its model of man. But, as Strauss shows, this will not suffice. This is but an extension of animality, and does not offer modern man anything other than the illusion of escape. “We are compelled to live with books. But life is too short to live with any but the greatest books.”

VII The Socratic Re-turn

As one approaches the center of his essay, Strauss remarks, “In this respect as well as in some others, we do well to take as our model that one among the greatest minds who because of his common sense is *the* mediator between us and the greatest minds. Socrates never wrote a book, but he read books” (6/5). Strauss then proceeds to quote a statement of the Xenophontic Socrates about his reading, followed by Xenophon’s assessment of this statement, followed by a “report” from Diogenes Laertius regarding Socrates’ reading. In each case, however, Strauss omits any identification of the particular

³⁴ Nietzsche describes his Rousseauean as volcanic (151/ IV.7), just as Strauss does in his discussion of Rousseau in *Natural Right and History* (p252).

³⁵ As Strauss notes in discussing the *First Discourse* however, the problem is not science, but its popularization (Cf, *On the Intention of Rousseau*, p260 *Natural Right and History*).

³⁶ A state of nature lacking the chief attractive qualities of the first, such as complete bodily health and the freedom of self-sufficiency.

source.³⁷ The quotations are to the point. Socrates regarded the books of the wise men of old as treasures, and that the reading together of great books (presumably, the more experienced pupils assisting the less experienced) to be a chief benefit of friendship. Xenophon considered this to be evidence that Socrates was blessed, and “that he was leading those listening to him toward perfect gentlemanship.” We wish to emphasize the significance of Xenophon’s remark and thus Strauss’ citing of it. The word for gentlemanship in Greek means literally “nobility and goodness”, and Xenophon describes Socrates’ educative efforts as leading to *perfect* gentlemanship. Strauss is quick to point out that we do not know from this report what Socrates did with the passages that he was uncertain about, and to this point cites Diogenes Laertius. According to *his* report, when Euripides presented Socrates with the writing of Heraclitus, Socrates said, “What I have understood is great and noble; I believe this is also true of what I have not understood; but one surely needs for understanding that writing some special sort of a diver.” That is, when one is uncertain of aspects in the texts of the wise men of old, one endeavors to understand them rather than dismiss them, even if what is required is the hermeneutical equivalent of a Delian diver. In any event, Strauss again emphasizes to his readers that the great books may require some significant effort to understand, and that reading in common, with the help of more experienced pupils, is integral to said efforts.

The quotations Strauss has selected apparently indicate that Socrates is the model reader. However, as we have seen, Strauss’ turn to Socrates at this point in his essay may indicate that we ought to take Socrates as our model “teacher who is not in turn a pupil”, i.e., our model founder. In this light, Strauss’ quotations regarding Socrates’ reading appear most perplexing, for this would seem to make of Socrates -- that “one

³⁷ Xenophon: *Memorabilia*, I.6(14). Diogenes Laertius: *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book II, Chapter 5.

turning point and vortex of so-called world history”³⁸ -- into a pupil of earlier teachers, and not one of the “greatest minds”. Notice, however, how Strauss introduces his return to Socrates: “But life is too short to live with any but the greatest books. In this respect *as well as some others* we would do well to take [Socrates] as our model.” Moreover, because Socrates himself wrote no books, we can know him only as he figures in other men’s books. One can thus conclude that Strauss regards the books *featuring* Socrates as the greatest books. But if Strauss has Socrates in mind as the model reader *and* the model mediator between us and the greatest minds, we are still left with the difficulty that we encounter Socrates in a book, indeed the very books he is ostensibly to mediate for us. Thus, it would seem, he must somehow demonstrate how one can become an original greatest mind *through* being a pupil of earlier greatest minds.

So, Socrates is the model (in several respects) in Strauss’ essay, whereas Schopenhauer performs that same function in Nietzsche’s essay. And while Schopenhauer has been present in Nietzsche’s essay from the outset, “the Schopenhauerean man”, that is, the inspirational model presented to modern man to encourage his transfiguration, is formally introduced to the reader subsequent to the man of Rousseau and very near the center of the essay, as is Socrates in Strauss’ essay. In the interval Nietzsche has introduced the man of Goethe, the purely contemplative individual, the philosophic spectator, the cosmopolitan traveler.³⁹ Such a model lacks the explosive popular effect of the man of Rousseau, and is the preserve of the few. However, such a model is almost completely ineffectual. The man of Schopenhauer, by contrast, somehow unifies both the explosive deeds of the man of Rousseau, with the thoughtful, reflective

³⁸ *Birth of Tragedy*, Section 15.

³⁹ Nietzsche portrays Goethe’s *Faust* as a sort of misbegotten Rousseauean (151-2/IV.8). Strauss does something very similar in *The Three Waves of Modernity* (p93-4, *Political Philosophy*).

qualities of the man of Goethe.⁴⁰ In filling out his account of Schopenhauer, however, Nietzsche focuses on his most Socratic characteristics. While considerations of space will limit us to simply compiling a list accompanied by the briefest of comment, this will suffice to support our claim, and thereby respond to the most obvious objection to the case we are presenting: namely, the conspicuous fact that Strauss never mentions Schopenhauer.⁴¹

At first blush, Nietzsche's Schopenhauerean man would seem to bear little resemblance to a conventional understanding of Socrates. But from the outset he is depicted as suffering mightily for the sake of the truth, in continual opposition with the community in which he resides. Socrates, as is well known, also 'suffered mightily' -- indeed, was killed by his Athenian compatriots, a fact Nietzsche raises explicitly later in the essay.⁴² Nietzsche's Schopenhauerean man recognizes that "all that exists can be denied and deserves to be denied; and being truthful means believing in an existence that can in no way be denied, which is itself true and without falsehood" (153/IV.9). Socrates is, of course, famous for his *refuting* (the *elenchus* method) and his mastery of the art of contradiction. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche himself asserts that "Wherever Socratism turns its searching eyes it sees lack of insight and the power of illusion; and from this lack it infers the essential perversity and reprehensibility of what exists".⁴³ However, Nietzsche also adds, that the Socratic man, like his Schopenhauerean, had "faith

⁴⁰ This very synthesis of the contemplative and the active, of speech and deed, is itself Socratic, and points towards both understandings of political philosophy as indicating both a specific kind of subject matter as well as a specific manner of treatment. The explosive Rousseauean is impolitic, while the contemplative Goethean is politically ineffectual.

⁴¹ Though, as even the stupidest commentators notice, "'Schopenhauer as Educator' is bewildering mainly because it is so little concerned with Schopenhauer" (Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction*, p22).

⁴² "Socrates fell victim to the wrath of the fathers" (183/VIII.2) and "Socrates could not have lived among us and would in any event not have attained seventy" (174/VI.13).

⁴³ *Birth of Tragedy*, Section 13. Walter Kaufmann trans.. See also *Birth of Tragedy* 15: "To fathom the depths and to separate true knowledge from appearance and error, seemed to Socratic man the noblest, even the only truly human vocation."

that the nature of things can be fathomed”.⁴⁴ To that extent then, Schopenhauer seems Socratic. Nietzsche describes the Schopenhauerean man as “strangely composed about himself and his own welfare” (153/IV.9), just as he had described Socrates as bringing about his own execution “with perfect awareness and without any natural awe of death.”⁴⁵ Nietzsche warns that the Schopenhauerean man “will be misunderstood and for long thought an ally of powers he abhors; however much he may strive after justice he is bound, according to the human limitations of his insight, to be unjust” (153/IV.9). The best he can hope for then, is a heroic life. Socrates was condemned for committing injustice, and was considered a sophist by most of his fellow citizens for the duration of his life. He is today regarded as *the* philosophic hero. The Schopenhauerean man “least of all lets himself be given gifts or compelled -- he knows as well as any little man how to take life easily and how soft the bed is on which he could lie down”. Even in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, Socrates is conspicuously portrayed as not demanding or requesting gifts of any kind and as living a hard, ascetic life. Xenophon goes so far as to assert that he “wondered if someone professing to teach virtue would demand money”.⁴⁶ The Schopenhauerean man recognizes in human arrangements the objective of ceasing to be aware of life, while he desires the opposite, “to be aware precisely of life, that is to say to suffer from life”. What Socratic pronouncement is more famous than his assertion in Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* that, “the unexamined life is not worth living” -- in effect, that the life of full awareness is to be sought regardless of potentially painful consequences. Socrates accused his contemporaries of dozing through life, and characterized himself as a gadfly dedicated to stinging people to wakefulness. Later, Nietzsche will describe the “spirit voices” that “will not let us sleep” (of which

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Section 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Section 13.

⁴⁶ *Memorabilia*, I.2.7.

Schopenhauer is one) to “gnats”⁴⁷ Again, later in the essay, Nietzsche asserts that he “could well envisage a degree of pride and self-esteem which would lead a man to say to his fellow men: look after me, for I have something better to do, namely to look after you” (184/VIII.4). In Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, we hear Socrates offer as an alternative penalty to execution, free meals at the public’s expense. “What, then, is fitting for a poor man, a benefactor, who needs to have leisure to exhort you? There is nothing more fitting, men of Athens, than for such a man to be given his meals...”.⁴⁸ Nietzsche’s Schopenhauerean man resolves, in distinctly Socratic language, not to allow those around him to “kidnap him out of his own cave” (154/IV.9). To him “the eternal becoming is a lying puppet-play in beholding which man forgets himself” (155/IV.9). We may recall that in the allegory of the cave, the shadows are cast on the wall over a puppeteer’s divide by puppeteers holding puppets.⁴⁹ Rather than seeking truth, and forever being disappointed, the man of Schopenhauer “seeks untruth in everything”. Is this not a startlingly apt encapsulation of the Socratic method, culminating in his knowing only that he knows nothing? And for this Socratic Schopenhauer:

The earth loses its gravity, the events and powers of the earth become dreamlike, transfiguration spreads itself about him as on summer evenings. To him who sees these things it is as though he were just beginning to awaken and what is playing about him is only the clouds of a vanishing dream. These too will at some time be wafted away: then it will be day -- (155/IV.9).

What is the significance of Nietzsche’s Schopenhauer (or Schopenhauerean man)

⁴⁷ In the notebooks from this period, Nietzsche is quite explicit about the Socratic character of Schopenhauer (and thus his own ‘Platonism’). Consider, in light of Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* (30e, 39cd) the following: “That is why they rave in their hostility at anyone who, like Schopenhauer, recognizes their need and sits like a gadfly on their neck; in such moments they gesticulate and make faces so crude and unrestrained that the mask of ‘elegance’ and ‘beautiful form’ often falls off. But if an entire army of such gadflies descends upon them, then nothing at all remains of their ‘culture’” (*Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, 34(22)).

⁴⁸ *Apology of Socrates*, 36d.

⁴⁹ *Republic*, 514a-515a.

being cast in such thoroughly Socratic light? What is it that Schopenhauer and Socrates demonstrate? How do they do so? Why is it important?

VIII The Problem of Socrates

In turning to Socrates at this crucial point in the essay, and by quoting two widely divergent sources, Strauss implicitly draws his readers' attentions to the "Problem of Socrates".⁵⁰ That is, Socrates is that single, exemplary instance of a semi-divine founder who stands at the fountainhead of the West.⁵¹ But we who have lost touch with our origins, have consequently forgotten the original meaning of Socrates. Yet, in our efforts to understand "Western rationalism" or "Socratic culture",⁵² we are confronted with a monumental historical problem, precisely because Socrates did not himself write books. We are dependent on others for our understanding of Socrates, and they seem to disagree both in their accounts and their judgments of him.⁵³

And, if Socrates is the model lurking behind Nietzsche's understanding of the philosopher, as a wide variety of textual evidence has led us to suggest, then Nietzsche too must come to terms with these same difficulties. That is, in implicitly likening

⁵⁰ For Nietzsche, as for Strauss who followed him, this 'problem' was a lifelong preoccupation. From his first work, the *Birth of Tragedy*, to his late *Twilight of the Idols*, Socrates was a central concern of Nietzsche's. Strauss too takes up this "most questionable phenomenon of antiquity" in a number of his writings, occasionally drawing particular attention to the 'problem's' Nietzschean roots (see Introduction to *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 'The Problem of Socrates: Five Lectures' in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 'The Problem of Socrates' in *Interpretation* Vol.22, No.3.).

⁵¹ "According to [our Great Tradition] political philosophy was founded by Socrates" (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, p3).

⁵² "The problem of Socrates as we have sketched it... can only be preparatory to the 'problem of Socrates' as stated by Nietzsche.... In other words, the return to the origins of the Great Tradition has become necessary because of the radical questioning of that tradition, a questioning that may be said to culminate in Nietzsche's attack on Socrates or on Plato" (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, p6). "These lectures represent an attempt to go back to the origins of rationalism, and therefore to Socrates" (p117, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*).

⁵³ "Since Socrates did not write books or speeches, we depend entirely on other men's reports for our knowledge of the circumstances in which, or of the reasons for which, political philosophy was founded. The difficulty is increased by the fact that the reports in question are not in entire agreement with one another" (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, p3).

Schopenhauer to Socrates, he must confront the historical problem posed by the fact that we have no direct access to Socrates. In the third section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche proclaims, notably not in the past tense, that “I profit from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example” (136/III.1). This example is “supplied by his outward life and not merely in his books -- in the way, that is, which the philosophers of Greece taught, through their bearing, what they wore and ate, and their morals rather than what they said, let alone by what they wrote” (137/III.1). Nietzsche is ostensibly endeavoring to demonstrate how Schopenhauer can truly educate -- that is, serve as exemplary proof that a truly philosophic life is still possible and worthy of emulation. And yet, he is clear that he encountered Schopenhauer only in the form of a book, just as he and Strauss discover Socrates. Nonetheless, Nietzsche avers that he was obliged to try all the harder to see through the book and to imagine the living man, for it is this understanding of the living man, his moral example, manifest in what he wore and ate, his bearing and comportment, which supposedly demonstrates the supremacy of the philosophic life.

And this is how coming to know oneself, and coming to know another differ radically. In the first section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche identified two possible paths whereby one could come to know oneself. One could “tunnel into oneself”; however, he warned that this is not only “painful and dangerous”, but unnecessary, for “everything bears witness to what we are, our friendships and enmities, our glance and the clasp of our hand, our memory and that which we do not remember, our books and our handwriting” (129/I.4). Consequently, there is another route to self-knowledge: careful consideration of one’s ladder of loves, which are reflected in one’s outward deportment. And while the former is the most direct route, it is accessible only to the individual himself; whereas, in principle, all the outward manifestations that

Nietzsche subsequently catalogues are accessible to another. This, it would seem, is how one can come to transform the figure in the book into a living example. This is how Socrates can be made alive, and how Nietzsche brought Schopenhauer alive. We must seek to learn their fundamental constitution through their outward bearing.

In this regard, however, Schopenhauer presents an even more problematic example than does Socrates, insofar as our sources for the historical Socrates actually tell us a great deal about such small details. But here Nietzsche seemingly comes to our rescue. Through his heavily embellished portrait, his “imperfect painting” of Schopenhauer, he has provided us with numerous *petits faits* about Schopenhauer that evidence his fundamental constitution. Nietzsche’s essay provides with respect to Schopenhauer what the books of Xenophon, Plato and Aristophanes do with respect to Socrates. But whereas these ancient authorities were direct observers of their subject, Nietzsche admits to never having laid eyes on Schopenhauer.⁵⁴ In this respect, Nietzsche’s relationship to Schopenhauer is more akin to that of Diogenes Laertius’ with Socrates than that of Plato. But for the reader of either Plato or Nietzsche, the difference is perhaps irrelevant, since in each case the reader must himself “imagine the living man” -- in the first instance Socrates or Schopenhauer, but ultimately the creators of these literary characters: Plato and Nietzsche, who through their characters reveal their own natures. It is in this way that Socrates is the mediator between ourselves and “the greatest books”: he is a mid-way point between ourselves and Plato and Xenophon, the way Schopenhauer is with respect to us reading Nietzsche. From the standpoint of a Plato or a Nietzsche, such a character,

⁵⁴ “But I had discovered [Schopenhauer] only in the form of a book, and that was a great deficiency” (136/II.8).

a Socrates or a Zarathustra, is a further mask behind which he can hide.⁵⁵

So it is in this sense that on Strauss' and Nietzsche's accounts, Socrates/Schopenhauer the man, imagined into existence from between the lines of books, is to act as our "mediator" with the great books and "the greatest minds", though he is a central figure in "the greatest books". But we have also been alerted to the secondary problem, namely how one who read, and to that extent was a pupil of earlier minds, himself became an original teacher who is not in turn a pupil.

In the eighth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche alerts his readers that "The only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves something" is that of "trying to see whether one can live in accordance with it" (187/VIII.6). Indeed the entire portrait of the Schopenhauerean man provided in section four is a model to "inspire mortals to a transfiguration of their own lives" (150/IV.7). Only if such a transfiguration is possible -- that is only if books can truly liberate and educate -- does the enterprise of philosophic writing make any sense whatsoever. The founder of liberal education in this literary sense is Plato, for it is Plato above all who presents us with an inspiring portrait of Socrates. A Socrates made "young and beautiful" -- that is, a fictionalized Socrates.⁵⁶

But Nietzsche's Schopenhauer too is heavily fictionalized. Details about which Nietzsche could not possibly be aware are related to his readers. Furthermore, Schopenhauer is presented in almost total isolation from his characteristic philosophic doctrines. Nietzsche goes so far as to attribute almost unrivaled cheerfulness to Arthur Schopenhauer. Insofar as Nietzsche's deed in speech is fictionalized and designed to

⁵⁵ Nietzsche effectively licenses our 'discovery' of Socrates in his portrait of Schopenhauer, as well as our likening his role *vis a vis* Schopenhauer to Plato's relationship to Socrates with what he says in the account of the essay in *Ecce Homo*: "What I did was to take two famous and still altogether undetermined types [Schopenhauer and Wagner] by the forelock, as one takes an opportunity by the forelock, in order to say something, in order to have a couple more formulas, signs, means of expression in my hands. This is, with perfectly uncanny sagacity, even indicated in the third untimely essay [*Schopenhauer as Educator*]. It was in this way that Plato employed Socrates, as a semiotic for Plato" (*Ecce Homo*, p57).

⁵⁶ 2nd letter, 314c.

inspire, as he adamantly affirms it is, it points his readers emphatically towards Plato and Platonic model of philosophic writing. This is to make of Nietzsche a “Platonic” political philosopher in this respect at least.

IX The Platonic Political Philosopher

Strauss begins the second half of his essay equating “education to perfect gentlemanship” with education in human excellence, and asserting that “liberal education consists in reminding oneself of human excellence, of human greatness” (6/6). That is, the primary purpose of liberal education is to acquaint a student with the highest education, as provided, or indicated by “the greatest minds” in “the greatest books”.⁵⁷ In the previous paragraph, by quoting Xenophon Strauss reminded his readers that Xenophon felt that Socrates led those listening to him to “perfect gentlemanship”. He now asks how, or “by what means does liberal education remind us of human greatness?” (6/6). He continues, “We cannot think highly enough of what liberal education is meant to be.” Here Plato makes his first appearance in Strauss’ essay: “We have heard Plato’s suggestion that education in the highest sense is philosophy” (6/6). Recall that in the previous paragraph we were warned that in an illiterate society, the late heirs “cannot know whether their fathers or grandfathers have not deviated from what the original founders meant, or have not defaced the divine message by merely human additions or subtractions” (6/5). The historical Socrates may (or may not) have been the founder of liberal education and political philosophy, but it is the divine Plato who, enshrining his own embellished image of Socrates in permanent writings, ensures that we have a means of detecting the human, all-too-human modifications on his teaching that are apt to arise

⁵⁷ “Although it is foolish to believe that book learning is anything like the whole of education, it is always necessary, particularly in ages when there is a poverty of living examples of the possible high human types.” Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p21.

subsequently. Liberal Education by means of books is Platonic, if not the essence of Platonism.⁵⁸

Strikingly in parallel with Strauss' procedure, Nietzsche begins the second half of his consideration of Schopenhauer by confessing that he has been imperfectly “painting” Schopenhauer “as his Platonic ideal” (156/V.1). The result is a character made young and beautiful, a fiction, like Plato’s Socrates. Thus, just as Strauss’ central two paragraphs end and begin with a shift from Socrates to Plato, so Nietzsche’s central two sections shift from a strangely Socratic Schopenhauer to an avowedly Platonic intention. Moreover, just as Strauss identified the framing question of this second half of his essay as “In what way, by what means does liberal education remind us of human greatness” (6/6) (i.e., educate us about the highest education), so Nietzsche begins the second half of *Schopenhauer as Educator* by asserting that “the hardest task still remains:... to demonstrate that this ideal *educates*” (156/V.1).

Strauss next offers a not altogether clear description of what philosophy is. “Philosophy is quest for wisdom or quest for knowledge regarding the most important, the highest, or the most comprehensive things” (6/6). While such knowledge is virtue and happiness, “wisdom is inaccessible to man, and so virtue and happiness will always be imperfect” (6/7). Strauss either conflates knowledge with wisdom, or leaves open the question of whether the philosopher as knowledgeable, but not wise, is virtuous and happy. Similarly, Nietzsche remarks, “The thinkers of old sought happiness and truth

⁵⁸ As Strauss puts it in the Introduction to *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, “The Platonic way, as distinguished from the Socratic way, is a combination of the way of Socrates with the way of Thrasymachus; for the intransigent way of Socrates is appropriate only for the philosopher’s dealings with the elite, whereas the way of Thrasymachus, which is both more and less exacting than the former, is appropriate for his dealings with the vulgar. What Farabi suggests is that by combining the way of Socrates with the way of Thrasymachus, Plato avoided the conflict with the vulgar and thus the fate of Socrates. Accordingly, the revolutionary quest for the other city ceased to be necessary: Plato substituted for it a more conservative way of action, namely, the gradual replacement of accepted opinions by the truth or an approximation to the truth” (p16-7).

with all their might -- and what has to be sought shall never be found, says nature's evil principle" (155/IV.9). Earlier he had approvingly quoted Schopenhauer's assertion, "A happy life is impossible: the highest that man can attain to is a heroic one" (153/IV.9). Strauss informs us that, irrespective of his happiness,⁵⁹ the philosopher is "declared to be" the only true king; "he is declared to possess all the excellences of which man's mind is capable, to the highest degree" (7/6). Strauss is led from this understanding of the philosopher to conclude that "we cannot be philosophers", and thus cannot fully realize education in the highest sense. Here the 'we' is not all mankind, but almost all. Recall, there are "greatest minds", but they are "extremely rare" -- not apt to be met in any classroom, or anywhere else.

Nor is Strauss alone in feeling thus in the face of this Platonic conception of the philosopher. In one of the most beautiful passages in the essay, Nietzsche remarks that upon reflecting on his 'platonized' Schopenhauer, specifically how much he must have *heard*, one may well exclaim to oneself:

'Alas, your deaf ears, your dull head, your flickering understanding, your shriveled heart, all that I call mine, how I despise you! Not to be able to fly, only to flutter! To see what is above you but not to be able to reach it! To know the way that leads to the immeasurable open prospect of the philosopher, and almost to set foot on it, but after a few steps to stagger back!' (159/V.6)

Earlier Nietzsche, also hiding behind or within an ambiguous 'we', confessed that even in moments of startling clarity, "we feel at the same time that we are too weak to endure those moments of profoundest contemplation..." (159/V.5). He then asks who these are that awaken us, that "lift us up", and yet reveal us as incomplete and weak, and answers,

⁵⁹ One would be hard pressed to exaggerate the significance of this observation, and all that it entails, with respect to Strauss' Nietzschean Platonism. For Strauss conspicuously attributes this view to Nietzsche in his important 'Three Waves of Modernity' essay. There we hear him characterize Nietzsche's view: "there is no possibility of genuine happiness, or the highest of which man is capable of has nothing to do with happiness" (*Political Philosophy*, p94-5).

in the very central paragraph of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, “They are those true *men*, *those who are no longer animal, the philosophers, artists and saints*”.

Strauss similarly remarks, immediately after suggesting that we distinguish philosophy professors from philosophers, just as we distinguish genuine artists from art teachers:

We cannot philosophize, but we can love philosophy; we can try to philosophize. This philosophizing consists at any rate primarily and in a way chiefly in listening to the conversation between the great philosophers or, more generally and more cautiously, between the greatest minds, and therefore in studying the great books. (7.6)

This may remind us of Strauss’ earlier use of a clarifying clause in the opening paragraph. “Those teachers who are not in turn pupils are the great minds, or, in order to avoid any ambiguity in a matter of such importance, the greatest minds” (3/1). But with respect to this present use, Strauss explicitly expands the range of voices to be listened to from “the great philosophers” to, the more general and cautious expression, “the greatest minds”. Strauss thus implicitly alerts his readers that artists too may be considered among the greatest minds, and thus also ought to be listened to by one who would love philosophy and try to philosophize. Or does he mean to suggest that we ought to be particularly interested in artistic philosophers?

To summarize, Nietzsche and Strauss both conclude the structural first half of their essays with reference to Socrates, and they both begin their second halves with reference to Plato. Both raise the question as to how a recognition of philosophy as the highest human activity educates. More specifically, both ask how an individual, perhaps even a fictionalized individual, can educate one to realize human excellence for oneself, particularly since an elevated conception of philosophy may tend rather to discourage rather than encourage, to foster only a dangerous dissatisfaction with oneself, an

awareness of our distance from the greatest minds. Both identify the activity of educating oneself to such a conception of human excellence as *listening* to the greatest minds, and both point to philosophers and artists as examples of such voices. Beyond that perhaps, both Strauss and Nietzsche in deed indicate the central importance of artistic philosophers.

In thus shifting from Socrates, who educated those “listening” to him to “perfect gentlemanship”, to Plato, who provides us with the perennial possibility of listening to Socrates, Strauss is inviting his readers to reflect upon the Platonic solution to the “problem of Socrates”. Plato admittedly fictionalizes his Socrates. He ‘paints’ him young and beautiful. That is, Plato is both artist and philosopher, a Socrates who practices music.⁶⁰ Listening to this music is akin to listening to Socrates. However, unlike Socrates, Plato’s music lives past the age of 70. Indeed, it is emphatically future-directed, and offers the model *par excellence* to those who seek to transfigure their own lives.

But mightn’t this lofty, not to say ‘idealized’ portrait of the philosopher serve rather to discourage those who encounter it? If so, we need to be reminded that the actual flesh and blood individual *did* exist. Fortunately, for this purpose, we have Aristophanes and Xenophon, who acquaint us with a less beautiful, more distinctly human Socrates. Nietzsche must himself perform this function if he is to avoid discouraging his readers. His very human portrait of an imperfect Schopenhauer may lead one to say “that that in his nature which was imperfect and all too human brings us closer to him in a human sense, for it lets us see him as a fellow sufferer and not only in the remote heights of a genius” (143/III.6).

Finally, while the Platonic portrait of Socrates is the timeless paradigm for political philosophy, circumstances change, and access to Plato’s portrait, or the

⁶⁰ *Birth of Tragedy*, Section 14-15.

possibility of recreating such an image in oneself, can be jeopardized. For this reason, in order to demonstrate that the Socratic life is still possible, new ‘Plato’s’, new artistic philosophers are always needed to inspire and to tempt their readers to the philosophic life -- and never more than in times of crisis, when the very possibility of philosophy is at stake. This, it would seem, is Nietzsche’s intention in *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

Perhaps, however, the most telling indication of the ‘Platonism’ shared by Strauss and Nietzsche emerges from the bold assertion in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that “it has been the proper task of all great thinkers to be lawgivers as to the measure, stamp and weight of things” (144/III.8). In ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’, Strauss makes a strikingly similar statement: “the true political art, the art which enables a man not only to obey laws but to frame laws, is acquired by education, by the highest form of education, which is necessarily the preserve of those who can pay for it.”⁶¹ Both Strauss and Nietzsche recognize the imperfection of political life and the superiority of the philosophic life. Both also see in philosophy the highest form of legislation. The solution, on the Platonic account, is the rule of philosophers, if not directly, then indirectly. Strauss thus proceeds from Plato’s suggestion that “education in the highest sense is philosophy” to the declaration that “the philosopher... is declared to be the only true king; he is declared to possess all the excellences of which man’s mind is capable, to the highest degree” (6). Nietzsche, too, seems preoccupied with the ‘philosopher-king’ throughout his essay. Having noted the earlier reference to the thinker as lawgiver, we should notice as well its echo, “that [the philosopher] is capable of drawing whole nations after him through his example is beyond doubt; the history of India, which is almost the history of Indian Philosophy, proves it” (136-7/III.1).

⁶¹ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p13.

Secondly, both authors follow Plato in emphasizing the chance existence of the philosopher.⁶² We have heard Strauss' remark that "it is a piece of good luck if there is a single [greatest mind] alive in one's time" (3/1). Likewise Nietzsche asserts, "It often seems as though an artist and especially a philosopher only chances to exist in his age" (178/VII.2), and again later, "[T]he goal of [a species'] evolution lies... in those apparently scattered and chance existences which favorable conditions have here and there produced" (162/VI.2). If, thirdly, we add the imagery of painting, we need only catalogue its uses and point out parallels in Plato's *Republic*.⁶³ Fourthly, we could, along similar lines, point out the numerous references to caves, and light and darkness⁶⁴ -- images Strauss himself conspicuously employs in 'Liberal Education and Responsibility'.⁶⁵

Next there is the implied semi-divine status of the philosopher, a notion which Plato has immortalized in his portrait of the now eternally young and beautiful Socrates. Again we could emphasize the implication of Nietzsche's struggle to learn from a philosopher which he encounters in a book. In any event, Nietzsche's Platonic concerns, in particular his preoccupation with the philosopher-king, is made explicit in the eighth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, which we will examine more fully in what follows.

Suffice it to say, Nietzsche's intention in *Schopenhauer as Educator* is Platonic and proceeds in distinctly Platonic fashion, employing Platonic images, and aiming at a political effect by the same means as Plato exercised his: namely, through writing. Nietzsche's politics, just as Strauss who followed him, are Platonic. They are the politics on behalf or in defense of philosophy. They proceed through the liberal, that is liberating,

⁶² *Republic*, 497a.

⁶³ 472d vi, 484c, *Beyond Good and Evil* 296, *Phaedrus*, 488a, 500e-501c, 598bc, 603bc.

⁶⁴ The cave is, of course, the Platonic "image of our nature in its education and want of education" (*Republic*, 514a). The centrality of the sun to any agricultural endeavor would also seem worth noting.

⁶⁵ "Plato has presented this state of things by comparing the city to a cave from which only a rough and steep ascent leads to the light of the sun: the city as city is more closed to philosophy than open to it" (*Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p15).

education of subsequent generations through writings which can serve both to introduce one to philosophy and prepare one for philosophy to the extent one is naturally suited for it. Such writings are written to encourage respect for philosophy even among those who may never be philosophers, but who nonetheless wield political authority. However, while for Plato that class was the politically influential gentlemen, normally suspicious, if not hostile to philosophy, for Nietzsche and Strauss it is the academic community, the scholarly caste, which at present poses the most direct threat to philosophy. This is not to say that Nietzsche is oblivious to other threats to culture and philosophy; merely that the scholar, and in particular university philosophy, is the predominant concern.

X Strauss and Nietzsche on Academic Philosophy

It is at least worth noting that, in the approximate center of his essay, Strauss refers to the central teaching of Plato's *Republic*, namely:

Unless the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings or chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place, while the many natures now making their way to either apart from the other are by necessity excluded, there is no rest from ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for human kind....⁶⁶

However, Strauss asserts that the wisdom which would constitute virtue and happiness "is inaccessible to man and hence virtue and happiness will always be imperfect." There will be no permanent rest from ills. *Nonetheless*, "the philosopher, who, as such, is not simply wise, is declared to be the only true king" (7/6).

Strauss does not address the many interesting issues that this famous prescription raises. Instead, he tacitly focuses on the frequently overlooked but perhaps more vital

⁶⁶ *Republic*, 473c-e.

proscription which accompanies it: that a rest from human ills requires that all those not competent to be kings must be excluded from philosophy.⁶⁷ Just as political power in the wrong hands is dangerous to general human wellbeing, so too is philosophy. Thus, Strauss turns immediately to a discussion of academic ‘philosophers’. His dismissal of university professors of philosophy -- whose relationship to genuine philosophers he likens to that between genuine artists and “members of art departments” -- serves to distance still further authentic liberal education (or “Education to perfect gentlemanship, to human excellence”(6/6)) from what passes for education in the contemporary world. More particularly, however, in confronting academic philosophy directly, he shows that while some deviations from the divine message of a founder may be difficult to perceive, some are obvious, provided one is literate.⁶⁸

It would seem that Strauss shares this reading of the *Republic*, and thus this opinion of academic philosophy with Nietzsche. To begin with, the analogy between artists and philosophers which Strauss employs mirrors Nietzsche’s own repeated linking of philosophers and artists in his essay.⁶⁹ With respect to his discussion of the Platonic philosopher-king and academic philosophy, however, Nietzsche is far more explicit in drawing out the consequences for philosophy. In the eighth section of his essay, he remarks that:

Socrates fell victim to the wrath of the fathers over his ‘seduction of

⁶⁷ In so doing, Strauss has in two hardly noticeable moves indicated two of the most frequently overlooked, and yet startlingly illuminating features in this prescription: that it is *not* guaranteed to solve human ills, and that the non-kingly (to say nothing of the a-political) should be kept from philosophy. Nietzsche accomplishes a similar feat in his allusions to the philosopher-king in *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

⁶⁸ Of course, for Strauss true literacy is much more than merely the ability to recognize a candidate’s name on a ballot, or even to read the sports page.

⁶⁹ “It often seems as though an artist and especially a philosopher only *chances* to exist in his age” (178/VII.2), “That nature has wanted to make existence explicable and significant to man through the production of the philosopher and the artist is, given nature’s own desire for redemption, certain; yet how uncertain, how dull and feeble is the effect it generally achieves with the philosophers and artists!” (177/VII.2).

youth', and Plato for that reason considered it necessary to institute a whole new state if the existence of philosopher was not to be imperiled by the unreason of the fathers. It almost looks now as though Plato really did achieve something. For the modern state regards the promotion of philosophy as among *its* tasks... (183/VIII.2).

However, Nietzsche adds, "The last thing the modern state wants to do is to install philosophers as rulers". What it does do, however, is employ professors of philosophy to teach the history of philosophy to the youth. Nietzsche, however, emphasizes the anti-philosophic consequences of the institutionalizing of philosophy. Experience "tells us that nothing stands so much in the way of the production of the great philosopher by nature as the bad philosopher who works for the state" (184/VIII.3). It is the burden of the eighth section of his essay to elaborate on what consequences this co-option of philosophy by the state means for philosophy.

Both Strauss and Nietzsche take up the issue of academic philosophy immediately subsequent to, if not because of, their references to Plato's double-edged teaching of the philosopher-king. Both thus implicitly focus on the prescriptive aspect of the central prescription in the *Republic*. It seems that philosophers becoming kings is not enough, rather only those suited to being kings, ought to be permitted to philosophize. In light of this highest of all standards, Strauss it seems, as Nietzsche apparently has, disclaimed being a philosopher. And here we should bear in mind the fact that Strauss is himself a university professor. (As was Nietzsche at the time he wrote *his* essay!) By drawing the distinction, Strauss implicitly asks his readers to question the effect of attributing the title 'philosopher' to mere university professors, particularly if authentic philosophers are to play such a central role in liberal education. For on the analogy of the disjunction between artists and art teachers, academic philosophers are seen to be merely one sort of specialist, specializing in the presentation of what others

have thought, just as professors of art are specialists either in what others have created, or the techniques others have used in such creations.

Thus, while a lofty conception of the philosopher risks discouraging potential students, and may even ultimately generate malice or envy, academic philosophers make philosophy something absurd, or ludicrous. Strauss leaves it at the assertion: “It is as absurd to expect members of philosophy departments to be philosophers as it is to expect members of art departments to be artists” (7/6). By permitting those “who say that they are philosophers” to employ “a loose expression which is perhaps necessitated by administrative convenience” (7/6) we not only foster a false impression of what a philosopher is, we make of philosophy itself something absurd. Strauss, however, does not elaborate on why this is so. However, this is precisely the crux of Nietzsche’s attack on academic philosophy. “But granted that this troop of bad philosophers is ludicrous (*lacherlich*, or absurd) -- and who will not grant it? -- to what extent are they also *harmful*? The answer, in brief, is: *to the extent to which they make philosophy itself ludicrous*” (190/VIII.9).

The full scope and impact of Nietzsche’s critique of university philosophy cannot be treated here. However, we will briefly revisit its recurrent appearance in the essay, and dwell upon certain key aspects of the critique that Strauss had to have taken most seriously and responded to. For there is no escaping the fact that Strauss lived and died as a professor, a scholar, and to the appearance of many, an academic specialist.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ But, his drawing attention to the distinction, and his use of ‘we’ rather than ‘I’, may suggest the two are not mutually exclusive. After all, while it may be absurd to expect all members of art departments to be genuine artists, there would seem to be nothing precluding the possibility of a genuine artist being found amongst them. The threat, to the extent that there is one, would seem to be posed to the reputation and respect genuine artists and philosophers enjoy, and the potentially corrupting influence on the fragile natures of those suited to art and philosophy exuded by state-sponsored university positions. Nietzsche, however, does grant that very rare exceptions are imaginable: “In the case of Plato or Schopenhauer, such grandeur of disposition and expression would not alienate one; which is why precisely they could even be university philosophers...” (184/VIII.4).

Notably, Nietzsche's first assault on university philosophy emerges through his remark that he had discovered quite early on "how wretched we modern men appear when compared with the Greeks and Romans even merely in the matter of a serious understanding of the tasks of education. With the need for this in one's heart one can run through all Germany, especially its universities, and fail to find what one is seeking" (131/II.2). As we have seen, this concern parallels Strauss' assertion that we are unlikely to encounter an original teacher, one of the greatest minds, "in any classroom" (3/1), and are thus to seek for such teachers in the great books. Moreover, Strauss implicitly makes Nietzsche's point in juxtaposing the highest possible understanding of liberal education, that associated with Plato, with contemporary university 'philosophers'.

Nietzsche informs his readers that he had to discover his philosopher as educator, Schopenhauer, in the form of a book, just as Strauss maintained that the greatest minds are accessible only in their books. Thus, on Nietzsche's, and apparently also Strauss' view, the university is not, or at least is no longer, where one seeks to find a "serious understanding of the tasks of education."

In the sixth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche identifies explicitly and explains the goal of culture (the production of "individual great men"), and how it is to be facilitated. But the bulk of this longest section in the essay discusses in detail the forces which frustrate the realization of this goal. The state, the money-makers and the general desire for ostentation are attacked for promoting culture without any real understanding of the proper goal of culture. Thus they actually come to hinder the realization of its true goal. However, the main focus of Nietzsche's critique is on the opposition presented to the realization of the genius by the sciences and "their servants, the *men of learning*" (169/VI.8), that is, the typical scholar. Nietzsche dissects the

scholar as the scholar is accustomed to dissecting the rest of the world. He provides two successive lists of the peculiar concatenation of qualities and inclinations which characterize the scholar. The first list consists of four qualities common to most if not all such “men of learning”, and the second, of thirteen qualities, less common, but prominent nonetheless. The first list includes qualities that the man of learning surely shares with the philosopher. This first list thus intimates why it is that the ascendancy of scholarship is dangerous to, and even obstructing of the emergence of the philosopher. The sciences, it would seem, are drawing from the same talent pool as philosophy. Science, and the prestige of science, lures the curious, adventurous, huntsman-like young men, filled with a love for contradiction and victory, away from philosophy, but only to “ossify their humanity”. However, the sciences are only successful in doing so as a result of the ludicrous ineptitude of university philosophy. Later in the essay, Nietzsche informs his readers that “the individual sciences are now pursued more logically, cautiously, modestly, inventively, in short more philosophically than is the case with so-called philosophers” (189/VIII.8). As we have seen, Strauss has drawn his readers’ attentions to this same ‘so-called-ness’ of academic philosophers.

The eighth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator* begins by identifying Plato as the founder of liberal education. Freedom is the requisite condition for philosophizing as the Greeks did. But this freedom puts philosophy at odds with the polity, in particular with the fathers, who “in every age have put up the most determined resistance to their sons being philosophers” (183/VIII.2). Nietzsche seems to identify the modern state as ‘Platonic’, at least insofar as it “regards the promotion of philosophy as among *its* tasks”. But, we are warned, this state-sponsored philosophy must be examined to see whether it is understood *Platonically*.

Strauss, we have seen, clearly identifies Plato as the founder of liberal education, and he too warns that careful attention must be paid to whether the late heirs of Plato's Republic have not deviated from the divine message of their founder. And just as Strauss supposes at the outset of 'What is Liberal Education?' that "it is a piece of good luck" if a single greatest mind is alive in one's time, so Nietzsche asks "If the philosopher as a rule appears in his age by chance -- does the state now really set itself the task of consciously translating this fortuitousness into necessity and here too rendering assistance to nature?" (183/VIII.2). Needless to say, Nietzsche adamantly denies that the state either understands philosophy Platonically, or that it is seriously attempting to render assistance to nature in producing genuine philosophers, that is, "to produce new Platos" (not, notice, new Schopenhauers!). In fact, Nietzsche argues that by making of philosophy an "office of profit", by selecting who and how many will philosophize, by compelling the philosopher to reside in a certain place, to teach whoever enrolls (whatever their abilities), at fixed hours, and -- most dangerously -- by forcing philosophy to appear as the *history* of philosophy, the state creates the conditions for abandonment and desertion of philosophy.⁷¹ He even goes so far as to insinuate that this may be the state's intention.

⁷¹ The contentious may object that Strauss' lifelong preoccupation with the *history* of political philosophy makes him culpable of Nietzsche's charge, but this would mean overlooking Strauss' oft-repeated criticisms of the confusion of philosophy and the history of philosophy. The essay 'Political Philosophy and History' virtually begins with the assertion that "political philosophy is fundamentally different from the history of political philosophy itself" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p56). And as Strauss observes in 'What is Political Philosophy?', "Today, political philosophy is in a state of decay and perhaps of putrefaction, if it has not vanished altogether.... The only point regarding which academic teachers of political science still agree, concerns the usefulness of studying the history of political philosophy" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p17). Strauss' most unrestrained expression of the danger of confusing political philosophy with the history of political philosophy appears in the essay/lecture 'The Crisis of our Time' (repeated in slightly modified form in the introduction to *The City and Man*, p7-8): "Political philosophy, the decay of political philosophy into ideology, reveals itself today most obviously in the fact that in both research and teaching political philosophy has been replaced by the history of political philosophy.... It is, strictly speaking, absurd to replace political philosophy by the history of political philosophy. It means to replace a doctrine which claims to be true by a survey of errors, and this exactly what Sabine, for example, does. So, political philosophy cannot be replaced by the history of political philosophy" (p51).

Emerging from this sweeping indictment of university philosophy is Nietzsche's assertion that "it is a demand of culture that philosophy should be deprived of any kind of official or academic recognition". The state and the academy must be made to give up their pretense to being able to distinguish "between real and apparent philosophy."

Returning to the agricultural metaphor, Nietzsche advises, "Let the philosophers grow unintended, deny them all prospect of place and position" (190/VIII.9). For while Plato and Schopenhauer may have been magnanimous enough not to be corrupted by the recognition and salary offered by the state, "no state would ever dare to favor such men and install them in university posts" (184/VIII.4). The state fears philosophy -- and rightly so -- for authentic philosophy is at odds with the polity. The authentic philosopher intends "to apply the scalpel of truth to all things, including the body of the state" (185/VIII.4), and so the state is justified in defending itself against such a threat.

As for those who do teach philosophy in universities, Nietzsche warns:

So if anyone is to tolerate being a philosopher in the employ of the state, he will also have to tolerate being regarded as having abandoned any attempt to pursue truth in all its hideouts. At the very least he is obliged, so long as he is the recipient of favors and offices, to recognize something as being higher than the truth, namely the state. And not merely the state, but at the same time everything the state considers necessary for its well-being: a certain form of religion, for example, or of social order, or of army regulations -- a *noli me tangere* is inscribed on everything of this sort.
(185/VIII.4)

As Strauss puts it in "Liberal Education and Responsibility":

There is a fundamental disproportion between philosophy and the city. In political things it is a sound rule to let sleeping dogs lie or to prefer the established to the nonestablished or to recognize the right of the first occupier. Philosophy stands or falls by its intransigent disregard of this rule and of anything which reminds of it. Philosophy can only live side by side with the city.⁷²

⁷² *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p14.

Nietzsche informs us that:

The state never has any use for truth as such, but only for truth which is useful to it, more precisely for anything whatever useful to it whether it be truth, half-truth, or error. A union of state and philosophy can therefore make sense only if philosophy can promise to be unconditionally useful to the state... (190/VIII.10)

Or, as Strauss puts it (again in “Liberal Education and Responsibility”):

The philosopher as philosopher is responsible to the city only to the extent that by doing his own work, by his own well-being, he contributes to the well-being of the city: philosophy necessarily has a humanizing or civilizing effect. The city needs philosophy, but only meditately or indirectly, not to say in a diluted form.⁷³

On both Nietzsche’s and Strauss’ view, philosophy as such is at odds with the polity as such. The classic response, immortalized in Plato’s *Apology* and *Crito*, carves a niche in the city for philosophy by promising to abide by the laws of the city, even to die at its behest.⁷⁴ As Nietzsche reminds us, “Socrates fell victim to the wrath of the fathers, and Plato for that reason considered it necessary to institute a whole new state if the existence of the philosopher was not to be imperiled by the unreason of the fathers” (183/VIII.2).

How is it, then, that Nietzsche would advocate not merely that the state cease supporting philosophy, but actively persecute philosophy? Does he seriously wish to return to the pre-Platonic relationship between city and philosophy? For, as Strauss points out, in allowing philosophy to persist, the city may additionally gain in civility and humanity.

The difficulty, it seems -- for both Strauss and Nietzsche -- has emerged as a result of the misbegotten modern attempt to realize the Platonic goal of a polity expressly dedicated to cultivating philosophers, who in turn would serve the polity through their knowledge. As Nietzsche sees it, “It almost looks now as if Plato really did

⁷³ *Ibid*, p15.

⁷⁴ As Strauss puts it, “Plato suggests in his *Crito*, where he avoids the very term ‘philosophy’, that the philosopher owes very much indeed to the city and therefore is obliged to obey at least passively the laws even the unjust laws of the city and even to die at the behest of the city” (*ibid*, p15).

achieve something. For the modern state regards the promotion of philosophy as among *its tasks*" (183/ VIII.2). In contrast, Strauss assures us, "The classics had no delusions regarding the probability of a genuine aristocracy's ever becoming actual."⁷⁵

While Nietzsche offers no historical explanation for this transformation, Strauss does in his essay 'Liberal Education and Responsibility'. The moderns attempted to put philosophy decidedly into practice, to make contemplation active. They were aware, as Nietzsche is, that "a union between state and philosophy" (190/VIII.10) could only come about through philosophy's being useful to the state. In order to bring this about, the moderns replaced the "disinterested contemplation of the eternal" with "the relief of man's estate" as the goal of their efforts. The architects of this modern enterprise conceived of a situation where the men in control were "philosopher-scientists". As a consequence, "society came to take on such a character that it was more and more compelled to listen to the philosopher-scientists if it desired to survive."⁷⁶ But Strauss notes that as the project progressed, "philosophy and science... became divorced". The enormously productive and powerful sciences, housed in modern universities, are now given free rein to peddle their discoveries to their customers: the same customers whose salutary moral beliefs, for the most part religiously based, have been systematically undermined by those sciences. Moreover, the scientists themselves have given up on liberal education as an indispensable period of character formation in light of which their efforts could be guided. Finally, "What study did not do... trade did".⁷⁷ Thus, Strauss summarily concludes, "If we look then only at what is peculiar to our age or characteristic of our age, we see hardly more than the interplay of mass taste with high-grade but

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p20.

strictly unprincipled efficiency.”⁷⁸ Or, as Nietzsche describes it:

Now, how does the philosopher view the culture of our time?... When he thinks of the haste and hurry now universal, of the increasing velocity of life, of the cessation of all contemplativeness and simplicity, he almost thinks that what he is seeing are the symptoms of a total extermination and uprooting of culture. The waters of religion are ebbing away and leaving behind swamps or stagnant pools.... The sciences, pursued without any restraint and in a spirit of the blindest *laissez faire*, are shattering and dissolving all firmly held belief; the educated classes and states are being swept along by a hugely contemptible money economy.... The educated classes are no longer lighthouses or refuges in the midst of this turmoil of secularization; they themselves grow daily more restless, thoughtless and loveless. Everything, contemporary art and science included, serves the coming barbarism (148/IV.4).

This is the situation in which, according to Strauss, we now “raise the question of liberal education and responsibility.” In this situation, where “the insufficiently educated are bound to have an unreasonably strong influence on education”, and where “a man’s respectability becomes dependent on his being a specialist”⁷⁹ Strauss asks, “What then are the prospects for liberal education within mass democracy? What are the prospects for the liberally educated to become again a power in democracy?”⁸⁰

Strauss’ answer is three-fold. We can cultivate our own garden: that is, endeavor to the best of our abilities to provide ourselves with the cultivation we desire. Just as Nietzsche had to discover his philosopher as educator through a book and apparently on his own, we may do the same. If then we come to recognize how difficult such a feat is, and yet in the process recognize how important it is, we are free to set up “outposts which may come to be regarded by many citizens as salutary to the republic”, imparting to it a higher tone. Most importantly, inasmuch as we are today compelled to specialize, “we can try to specialize in the most weighty matters”. With respect to this latter

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p24.

recommendation, “we can expect more help from the humanities rightly understood than from the sciences”. For this reason “liberal education is now becoming almost synonymous with the reading in common of the Great Books. No better beginning could have been made.”⁸¹

Seeing that Nietzsche and Strauss so closely share an understanding of the crisis facing liberal education generally, and philosophy in particular, what, one might ask, does Nietzsche think of these three recommendations? We should note at the outset that the first possibility is available in practically any situation, and is that which Nietzsche elliptically alludes to at the outset of *Schopenhauer as Educator* in urging the youthful and dissatisfied soul to ““Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not yourself!”” (127/I.1). In order to cultivate one’s own garden, however, one must know what one is meant to be; one must be introduced to human excellence as manifested in figures like Schopenhauer. These figures, however, are encountered only in books. For Nietzsche, as for Strauss, the Great Books are the indispensable means of coming to hear of human excellence. As for setting up influential outposts of culture, Nietzsche’s speculations regarding alternative educational institutions appear near the conclusion of section six: “It demands,... a quite exceptional reflective capacity to be able to see beyond the educational institutions of the present to those altogether strange and different institutions which may perhaps be required only two or three generations hence” (175/VI.15). The real difficulty for mankind, however, lies in the necessity of its “relearning and envisaging a new goal” (175/VI.15), namely, the facilitation of the coming to fruition of the genius. Or, as Nietzsche expresses it: ““Mankind must work continually at the production of individual great men -- that and nothing else is its task”” (161/VI.1). But again, genius is known only through the Great Books, books we have

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p24.

almost altogether lost touch with. The return to these books is the starting point for a rejuvenation of philosophy, and therewith, culture.

The culminating complaint of Nietzsche's critique of the contemporary culture-mongers generally -- including the state, the supposedly 'cultivated class', the sciences and the money-makers -- is that they do not recognize, understand, know the goal of culture. Whereas section five culminates with Nietzsche proclaiming that he does "know what culture is", that is, what its goal is and how to promote it (161/V.8), section six, then, begins with his restatement and defense of his understanding of the goal, but the bulk of the section, by far the longest in the essay, is committed to establishing his claim that the contemporary world does not understand the true goal of culture. One who seeks an assessment of culture in their surroundings "is struck first of all by *how extraordinarily sparse and rare knowledge of this goal is*, how universal, by contrast, cultural endeavor is and what an unspeakable amount of energy is expended in its service" (163-4/VI.6). Following his description of the misemployed and misappropriated culture of the money-makers, the state, the fashionable, and the scholar, Nietzsche reiterates that "Knowledge of the goal of culture cannot be found in [the scholar] either" (174/VI.12). Nietzsche then summarizes what has been gained by these reflections: "The knowledge that where today culture seems most vigorously pursued nothing is known of this goal" (174/VI.13).

So, how does *Nietzsche* understand the goal of culture? "[T]he fundamental idea of *culture*,... sets for each one of us but one task: *to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint, within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature*" (160/V.8). As he asserted in concluding the fifth section, "[W]e

know what culture is. Applied to the Schopenhauerean man, it demands that we prepare and promote his repeated production by getting to know what is inimical to it and removing it -- in short, that we unwearingly combat that which would deprive *us* of the supreme fulfillment of our existence by preventing us from becoming such Schopenhauerean men ourselves" (161/V.8). This he reiterates several times. In an interesting anticipation of Zarathustra's teaching in the marketplace, Nietzsche also casts this goal in evolutionary terms: "When a species has arrived at its limits and is about to go over into a higher species, the goal of its evolution lies,... in those apparently scattered and chance existences which favorable conditions have here and there produced" (162/VI.1). It thus becomes the task, one may say responsibility, of mankind to "seek out and create the favorable conditions under which those great redemptive men can come into existence" (162/VI.1).

Strauss, whatever else he was, was a scholar. And not merely a scholar, but a scholar in that most suspect of studies, the history of philosophy. Does this not in itself utterly undermine our claim of an affinity between Strauss and Nietzsche on this most important issue? The question is whether Strauss, unlike most scholars, understands the goal of culture as Nietzsche presents it. Strauss virtually begins the essay 'Liberal Education and Responsibility' by asserting:

I own that education is in a sense the subject matter of my teaching and my research. But I am almost solely concerned with the goal or end of education at its best or highest -- of the education of the perfect prince...⁸²

Strauss later identifies the true political art as the ability to frame laws and not merely to obey laws, and that philosophy is clearly of a higher rank than politics. It would seem beyond question, then, that Strauss understands the goal of education and culture in

⁸² *Ibid*, p9. Elsewhere, presumably referring to this same education, Strauss tells us that "It would be an understatement to call it royal education" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p38).

essentially the same way as does Nietzsche.

It remains to be shown, however, why Strauss is not guilty of gross inconsistency simply by virtue of remaining a scholar, tacitly supporting institutions which obstruct the realization of what he himself recognizes to be the true goal of culture. For it is surely plausible to assume at this point that Strauss is consciously following Nietzsche in his understanding of culture and education, and is thus acutely aware of Nietzsche's critique of scholars and university philosophy.

Nietzsche, however, has left Strauss and, fortunately us in the universities, an 'out'. Notice that at the end of the list of strange and diverse qualities that come together in the man of learning, Nietzsche adds, "with the pious hope that [it] is more common and influential among scholars than it appears to be" (173/VI.10), the impulse to justice. Nietzsche remarks that, "a spark from the fire of justice fallen into a scholar's soul suffices to enkindle and purify his life and strivings, so that he no longer knows any rest and is forever expelled from the lukewarm or frosty mood in which scholars usually accomplish their daily work" (173/VI.10). Strauss, we note, by his own account worked both in and out of the classroom, in his teaching and research, towards "the education of the perfect prince". This was his whole life.

At the conclusion of the sixth section, Nietzsche describes the two paths which are presented to the man of learning "who has grasped this new fundamental idea of culture" (175/VI.15). The first path will win him acclaim, and rewards, laurels and powerful friends. His duties will be to "fight in rank and file" and to regard those who do not as enemies. The second path offers few companions, it is rough and steep and torturous. He will be mocked for making such a foolish selection by those who regard him as an enemy. Nietzsche next proceeds to ask what a "cultural institution means to

these dissimilar wanderers” (175-6/VI.15). He answers that for those on the first path, it provides the order by which their marching is organized, and ensures that those who choose another path are excommunicated. For the few on the other path such institutions, universities for example, provide “the protection of a firm organization” so as to prevent their being washed away by the tremendous crowd on the first path, and to prevent their premature exhaustion, and enable them to fulfill their work, their great task. Interestingly, Strauss comments, at the outset of ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’:

While I am dependent in many ways on the administration of education and hence on the organizations serving education, I looked at these things, if I looked at them, with that awe which arises from both gratitude and apprehension mixed with ignorance. I thought that it was my job, my responsibility, to do my best in the classroom, in conversations with students wholly regardless of whether they are registered or not, and last but not least in my study at home.⁸³

In light of Nietzsche’s suggestion we may conclude that Strauss’ gratitude arises from the protection and freedom such organizations provide him, and that his apprehension emerges from his sharing such institutions with those who seek his excommunication. However, these feelings are mingled with if not overshadowed by his ignorance and indifference to such institutions as a result of his wholehearted commitment to his task, his responsibility.

As a final note, we cannot fail to pay Strauss the compliment he so dearly sought to be worthy of, and has probably never been adequately paid. Namely, that he was precisely the scholar whose soul was lit by a spark from the fire of justice; the sort of individual Nietzsche characterizes at the very end of the sixth section:

For there *do* exist men who feel it as their *own* distress when they see the genius involved in toilsome struggle, or in danger of destroying himself...: and so I also hope there are some who understand what I am trying to say

⁸³ *Ibid*, p9.

with this exhibition of Schopenhauer's destiny and to what end, according to my notion, Schopenhauer as educator is actually *to educate*. -- (176-7/VI.15)

Nietzsche's Schopenhauer, like Strauss, educates by demonstrating that through being a scholar one may in fact nonetheless serve philosophy, provided one's own efforts are informed by an understanding of the true goal of culture, one's soul set to light by a spark from the fire of justice.

XI The Conditions for Philosophy

Following his claim to know the goal of education at its best and highest, Strauss had remarked that he was very little concerned with the conditions and ‘how’ of such an education. He subsequently observes, however, that “[a]s for the how, one knows it once one knows what education is meant to do to a human being or once one knows the end of education”.⁸⁴ Nietzsche repeatedly affirms in his essay that from knowledge about or into the goal of culture, a “circle of duties” may be derived. Indeed, in Nietzsche’s essay, he speaks of the ‘how’ often in the same breath as he states the goal of culture. Consider the following examples: “[T]he fundamental idea of culture... sets for each one of us but one task: *to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfection of nature*” (160/V.8). “[W]e know what culture is. Applied to the Schopenhauerean man, it demands that we prepare and promote his repeated production by getting to know what is inimical to it and removing it” (161/V.8). “[B]ecause it can arrive at a conscious awareness of its goal, mankind ought to seek out and create the favorable conditions under which those great redemptive men can come into existence” (162/VI.1).

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p9.

With respect to the conditions for education generally, Strauss identifies the most important as being “the qualities of the educator and of the human being who is to be educated; in the case of the highest form of education those conditions are very rarely fulfilled, and one cannot do anything to produce them; the only things we can do regarding them are not to interfere with their interplay and to prevent such interference.”⁸⁵ This latter recommendation directly alludes to Nietzsche’s prescription that, with respect to the Schopenhauerean man, culture “demands that we prepare and promote his repeated production by getting to know what is inimical to it and removing it”.

Nietzsche himself had pointed to these conditions in the second section of his essay. Firstly, through the example of the gifted young Benvenuto Cellini (later to become a master goldsmith as well as great sculptor, engraver, and author) Nietzsche points more substantially to what Strauss identified simply as “the qualities... of the human being who is to be educated”. Through the example of Cellini, Nietzsche momentarily ponders how it is that a philosopher would educate a young gifted individual. Rather than expand on this apparently very significant ‘variable’, namely, educational approach, Nietzsche proceeds to describe how rare true educators are, and what one commonly finds in their places. Thus, just as Strauss does, Nietzsche points to the rarity of these two most important conditions, at least with respect to the “highest form of education”.

While Strauss seems to remain silent on any additional conditions, later in his essay Nietzsche does identify and catalogue six conditions “under which the philosophical genius can in any rate come into existence in our time despite the forces working against it”: “free manliness of character, early knowledge of mankind, no scholarly education, no narrow patriotism, no necessity of bread-winning, no ties with the

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

state". Ultimately these six conditions reduce to "freedom and again freedom: that wonderful and perilous element in which the Greek philosophers were able to grow up" (182/VIII.1). We need hardly add here that Strauss understands the 'liberal' in 'liberal education' as both free and freeing, and as tracing its original meaning to the ancients. Consider his exposition on the word "liberal" in the fourth paragraph of 'Liberal Education and Responsibility':

To begin at the beginning, the word "liberal" had at the beginning, just as it has now, a political meaning, but its original political meaning is almost the opposite of its present political meaning. Originally a liberal man was a man who behaved in a manner becoming a free man, as distinguished from a slave.⁸⁶

Firstly we cannot fail to notice the stress on freedom. Secondly, let us not ignore the emphasis on "man". For Strauss uses the locution "human being" in the very next sentence:

A slave is a human being who lives for another human being, his master; he has in a sense no life of his own; he has no time for himself.⁸⁷

Is not Strauss here echoing, albeit unobtrusively, Nietzsche's first condition for philosophy: free manliness of character?

Strauss proceeds:

The truly free man who can live in a manner becoming a free man is the man of leisure, the gentleman who must possess some wealth...⁸⁸

Note that Nietzsche's fifth condition for philosophy was "no necessity for bread-winning". Notice also that Nietzsche's condition is not contradicted when, later in the essay, Strauss reminds us that "the philosopher may be poor" and that "Socrates lived in tenthousandfold poverty".⁸⁹ If one is prepared to live in poverty, one's life is little

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p13.

affected by any “necessity for bread-winning”.

Strauss next describes the education of this free man:

The education of the potential gentleman... consists above all in the formation of character and taste. The fountains of that education are the poets. It is hardly necessary to say that the gentleman is in need of skills. To say nothing of reading, writing, counting, reckoning, wrestling, throwing of spears, and horsemanship, he must possess the skill of administering well and nobly the affairs of his household and the affairs of his city by deed and by speech.⁹⁰

Whatever else one may say about this education, it is certainly *not* scholarly.⁹¹

Strauss proceeds next to explain how and where one acquires such an education:

He acquires that skill by his familiar intercourse with older or more experienced gentlemen, preferably with elder statesmen, by receiving instruction from paid teachers in the art of speaking, by reading histories and books of travel, by meditating on the works of the poets, and, of course, by taking part in political life.⁹²

This is to say, the young man educated in such a way acquires, in Nietzsche's words, “early knowledge of mankind”. We should also notice that while the professional teachers identified in the above excerpt may seem to share something with the scholar, Nietzsche had remarked in his essay, “Anyone who seriously wanted to train in Germany as an orator, for example,... would find that school nowhere; it seems not to have been realized that speaking [is an art] which cannot be acquired without the most careful instruction and arduous apprenticeship” (131/II.2). Unlike ancient Greece, the modern world is replete with scholars but is empty of teachers of rhetoric.

The two remaining conditions Nietzsche identified are “no narrow patriotism” and “no ties to the state”. We have already remarked on Strauss' disavowal of any parochialism in pointing out that “[t]he greatest minds to whom we ought to listen are by

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p11.

⁹¹ It reminds one especially of Xenophon.

⁹² *Ibid*, p11.

no means exclusively the greatest minds of the West" (7/6). Furthermore, we have seen that this remark parallels Schopenhauer's view that "its acquaintance with Indian philosophy [is] the greatest advantage our century possessed over all others" (192/VIII.10). As for the matter of "ties to the state" Strauss informs his readers in 'Liberal Education and Responsibility' that "philosophers are not as such a constituent part of the city. In other words, the only teachers who are as such a constituent part of the city are the priests. The end of the city is then not the same as the end of philosophy."⁹³ As Nietzsche puts it, "he who has the *furor philosophicus* within him will already no longer have time for the *furor politicus*" (181/VII.4).

XII The Study of the History of Philosophy

Following his having observed the linguistic obstacle to our "listening to the greatest minds of the orient", Strauss begins the seventh paragraph of 'What is Liberal Education?' with an apparently unnecessary assertion: "To repeat: liberal education consists in listening to the conversation among the greatest minds." Firstly, we should notice that Strauss has *not* literally repeated himself. Rather, he has substantially altered what he had previously said, perhaps thereby indicating an important insight into the relationship between liberal education and philosophy. The passage he is referring to in his 'repetition' occurs in the previous paragraph: "This philosophizing consists at any rate primarily and in a way chiefly in listening to the conversation between the great philosophers or, more generally and more cautiously, between the greatest minds." If he *is* in some sense repeating himself, then it would seem that liberal education entails our

⁹³ *Ibid*, p14. One could adduce several additional examples of Strauss' emphasizing the tension between philosophy and politics. Not only does this serve to distinguish genuine philosophy from the sham, but it may actually conduce to the further separation of politics and philosophy -- something Strauss is not usually credited with working towards, but which we believe may inform his approach to this tension. Similar considerations may apply to his treatment of the opposition between Jerusalem and Athens.

trying to philosophize in this sense.⁹⁴

With this suggestion, however, Strauss has apparently presented us with “the overwhelming difficulty”, “a difficulty so great that it seems to condemn liberal education as an absurdity.” Because the greatest minds are encountered only through books, they are said by Strauss to “utter monologues”, this is so “even when they write dialogues”. If Socrates is the model mediator between ourselves and the greatest minds, Plato may be regarded as the model greatest mind.⁹⁵ For here Strauss uses Plato and his dialogues to illustrate both what is meant by the great minds uttering monologues, and how monumentally challenging transforming such monologues into a dialogue can be:

When we look at the Platonic dialogues, we observe that there is never a dialogue among minds of the highest order: all Platonic dialogues are dialogues between a superior man and men inferior to him. Plato apparently felt that one could not write a dialogue between two men of the highest order. We must then do something which the greatest minds were unable to do (7/7).

In most Platonic dialogues that superior man is Socrates, who was earlier established as *the* model mediator between ourselves and the greatest minds. Of course, Strauss’ evidence of Socrates’ reading (though not writing) came from Xenophon. Is Strauss subtly advocating adopting the Xenophontic Socrates as the mediator between ourselves and Plato, the Platonic Socrates, and the rest of the community of the greatest minds?

⁹⁴ “In the light of philosophy, liberal education takes on a new meaning: liberal education, especially education in the liberal arts, comes to sight as preparation for philosophy” *ibid*, p13. This observation, we may add, introduces a complex and somewhat discomfiting implication regarding the three-way relationship between philosophy, liberal education, and the polity. Liberal education, it would seem, being the child of a rather imperfect marriage of (or one may say compromise between) philosophy and politics, is constantly being quarreled over. Philosophy wants to make liberal education propaedeutic to itself, but the state wants liberal education to be training in good citizenship. Insofar as philosophy is in tension with the city it would seem that any education towards philosophy would come at the expense of attachment to the regime. Strauss seems to avoid this by portraying the truly politic philosopher as possibly the “best of citizens”.

⁹⁵ Notice again that the only species we can be certain Strauss includes under the genus “greatest mind” are artists and philosophers. These, we noted are two of three types of redemptive individuals Nietzsche identifies in his essay. As noted earlier, Nietzsche regularly speaks of the philosopher and artist in the same breath, and may be encouraging his readers to consider a synthesis of the two. Strauss, we suspect, has something similar in mind, and regards Plato as the model artistic philosopher.

Strauss never mentions the Platonic Socrates, though he talks about Socrates and Plato. Strauss, it would seem, has managed to do what he is encouraging his readers to do -- that is, to see through the books, the dialogues, and imagine the living man, just as Nietzsche proclaimed he had done with respect to Schopenhauer. In some sense, then, the historical Socrates is the model mediator, not ‘Socrates’ the literary character, be it of either Plato, Xenophon, or Aristophanes.⁹⁶ However, this Socrates only comes alive insofar as we have succeeded in penetrating the books, which Socrates the man is meant to help us to do. Indeed, this is “a difficulty so great that it seems to condemn liberal education as an absurdity”. Of course, it is all the more urgent that Socrates serve as our example once we recognize that he may well be one of the divine, or semi-divine founders of whom Strauss spoke in the fourth paragraph -- founders that our illiterate society has lost touch with.

However, the difficulties implicit in recreating this conversation between the greatest minds, in transforming “their ‘side-by-side’ into a ‘together’,” do not end by bringing that conversation to life. Quite to the contrary, Strauss claims that because “the greatest minds contradict one another regarding the most important matters”, they “compel us to judge of their monologues”. And yet “we cannot help but notice that we are not competent to be judges.”

Nietzsche’s critique of the study of the history of philosophy is one of the most puzzling aspects of *Schopenhauer as Educator*. For Nietzsche stresses that he encountered Schopenhauer only in a book. Moreover, Nietzsche’s familiarity with other

⁹⁶ Though in discussing the ‘Problem of Socrates’ Strauss seems repeatedly to draw our attention to the case for privileging the historical accuracy of Xenophon’s account. See in particular *Socrates and Aristophanes*, p3-4. One curiosity in Strauss’ writings on Xenophon is the absence of explicit references to Nietzsche. It is conceivable (though doubtful) that Nietzsche was not as enthralled by Xenophon as Strauss was (Strauss perhaps indicating as much in his comparing a taste for Xenophon with preferring Jane Austen to Dostoevski, the latter being a favorite of Nietzsche’s). This having been said, at the conclusion of his last book on Xenophon, Strauss quotes a passage from the German classicist B.G. Niebuhr, part of which Nietzsche himself quotes in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (*Xenophon’s Socrates*, p179, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, p183).

great philosophers in the tradition, Montaigne, Plutarch, Empedocles, Plato, Diogenes (the Cynic), even his reference to Diogenes Laertius, indicate that he himself was thoroughly versed in the study of the history of philosophy. Granted, Nietzsche, like Strauss, seems to deny that he is a philosopher in this essay (159/V.5-6), but nevertheless his critique of the study of the history of philosophy would seem to pertain to his own intellectual development.

We are thus obliged to look more closely at the critique Nietzsche levels against studying the history of philosophy. As we have noted, Nietzsche acknowledges a distinction between ancients and moderns with respect to the matter of judging the value of existence. Modern philosophy, committed not merely to the ancient task of judging existence, but to reforming it, has succeeded to some considerable degree in reforming existence, but in so doing has made the task of judging existence that much more difficult. Schopenhauer, however, on Nietzsche's account, succeeded in arriving at a just verdict, at a verdict akin to that of Empedocles. In 'Liberal Education and Responsibility' Strauss also argues at some length for there being this discrepancy between the ancients and the moderns as to their respective understandings of the goal of philosophy. But for Strauss, just as for Nietzsche, this has led to the necessity of studying the history of philosophy, in particular the disjunction between ancients and moderns, in order to recapture the original or founding understanding. As we shall see, Strauss sees the task of philosophy, as does Nietzsche, to be one of becoming "more than attentive and docile listeners, namely judges"; but Strauss, apparently unlike Nietzsche, casts this problem of judgment primarily with regards to our relationship to earlier "greatest minds".

Nietzsche's critique of the study of the history of philosophy occurs in the eighth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*. This critique follows upon and emerges out of his

discussion of academic philosophy, just as Strauss follows his discussion of university philosophy with a turn to the peculiar difficulties with the study of the history of philosophy. Nietzsche begins this critique in response to an imaginary interlocutor who objects that a university philosopher “is not supposed to be a thinker at all, but at most a learned presenter of what others have thought” (186/VIII.6). In response Nietzsche takes the part of the genius who “cannot immerse himself too deeply” in the world. Such a genius wants nothing to do with the history of opinions. He longs only to be what Strauss had called a “teacher who is not in turn a pupil”. The true philosopher has never concerned himself with mere historical questions.

Secondly, Nietzsche argues that university philosophers are bad historical scholars. He would have us consider the “soporific miasma” spread over Greek philosophy by German academicians. Nietzsche would rather read Diogenes Laertius, for although his account may be a distortion he at least shares the antique spirit with ancient philosophers (186/VIII.6). We may note in passing that Strauss too seems to share this preference for Diogenes Laertius, insofar as he quotes him and no academic philosopher to establish that Socrates was aware of ‘pre-Socratic’ philosophy (6/5).

Nietzsche’s third and final objection to the study of the history of philosophy takes the part of the student. He asks four questions:

[W]hat in the world have our young men to do with the history of philosophy? Is the confusing of opinions supposed to discourage them from having opinions of their own? Are they supposed to learn how to join in the rejoicing at how wonderfully far we ourselves have come? Are they supposed to learn even to hate philosophy or to despise it?
(187/VIII.6)

He answers, “One might almost think so...”, given the torment of having to cram mad, caustic, great and hard-to-grasp notions into their brains in order to pass philosophy

exams. He asks his readers to “imagine a youthful head, not very experienced in living, in which fifty systems in the form of words and fifty critiques of them are preserved side by side and intermingled”. Such a mode of instruction is by no means an education in philosophy, it is merely training to pass exams, and its frequent outcome is the student’s counting himself blessed that he is no philosopher, “but a Christian, and a citizen of my country” (187/VIII.6).

What becomes clear upon reflection, however, is that this latter objection is primarily directed at the ‘scholarly’ component of such an education, the “critique of words by means of other words”. Universities, Nietzsche testifies, have never taught the only *legitimate* critique of a philosophy: “namely, trying to see whether one can live in accordance with it”. In general, Nietzsche’s criticism does not condemn the study of the history of philosophy; rather, it only condemns how it is taught and the spirit in which it is undertaken. If university philosophers are superficial scholars, they should try to be better scholars (which in the case of philosophy requires that they be more than scholars). If students are led to cram their heads with philosophic positions side-by-side despite being incompetent judges, they should be either induced to give up philosophy or invited to become competent to judge: to “gaze upon things as the poet does, with pure, loving eyes” (186/VIII.6), to immerse himself more deeply in things, to attempt to live these philosophies. In this way, and in this way alone, can a history of philosophy serve a philosophic purpose.

And this is precisely what Strauss’ elucidation of the difficulties presented by the study of the history of philosophy invites. As we have seen, on Strauss’ account, “liberal education consists in listening to the conversation among the greatest minds”, and this is a primary and chief component of our trying to philosophize. Borrowing

Nietzsche's use of "side-by-side", Strauss remarks, "the greatest minds utter monologues. We must transform their monologues into a dialogue, their 'side-by-side' into a 'together'." Strauss observes that "the greatest minds contradict one another regarding the most important matters"⁹⁷ and thus they "compel us to judge of their monologues" while nonetheless reminding us that "we cannot but notice that we are not competent to be judges." This difficulty is overcome, then, only if our study of the history of philosophy is in the service of, or preliminary to, our actually philosophizing. Only to the extent that we ourselves become philosophers (those Nietzsche had earlier called *judges of life*) can we become competent to judge between the contrary positions of the greatest minds. Strauss emphasizes this difficulty by pointing out that even the Platonic dialogues do not feature a conversation between "two men of the highest order".⁹⁸

And in a sort of confirmation of the potentially liberating effect such studies can have, Nietzsche remarks that the state may indeed have reason to fear the study of philosophy, insofar as "rash and restless youth" of the kind Nietzsche addresses at the outset of *Schopenhauer as Educator* "get to know books forbidden them, begin to criticize their teachers and finally even become aware of the [anti-philosophic] objective of university philosophy" (191/VIII.10). Strauss, we cannot resist noting, regarded Nietzsche's texts as forbidden, and described his reading of them, while a university student, as "furtive".⁹⁹

This last 'biographical' remark may serve to direct our attention to the demonstration Strauss has just presented of how such conversations can be brought about. For even if we grant Strauss his humble denial of being himself a philosopher, we

⁹⁷ Nietzsche agrees, however much he obscures it. How else could he describe the torment of the youthful head crammed with "fifty systems"?

⁹⁸ The *Symposium* may be an exception, for Socrates and Aristophanes, side-by-side, are together, but do they converse?

⁹⁹ 'A Giving of Accounts' p2 in *The College*, (22), 1970.

must grant that his is a mind of a “higher-order”. He has, by so carefully concealing and revealing his dialogue with Nietzsche throughout this essay, and in particular on the subject of the history of philosophy, led us to bring about a conversation between him and Nietzsche, to transform their “side-by-side” into a “together”. Moreover, it is a conversation in which “if we listen carefully” they are both “saying the same thing”, just as Nietzsche asserted all ancient philosophers were. In other words, by re-creating their conversation, we have been led us to philosophize ourselves. Our study of just this bit of the history of philosophy has, to that extent, performed a philosophic function.

XIII Historicism and Liberal Education

Having left us to resolve two related, and apparently great, if not insurmountable difficulties confronting our philosophic study of the history of philosophy, Strauss turns to explaining how it is that the gravity of our situation vis a vis those greatest teachers and liberators is obscured. We “somehow believe” in the superiority of our point of view -- either because our time is later in time than that of the greatest minds, and we have acquired the prejudice that whatever comes later is an improvement on what came before; or, because the greatest minds could only hope to be right from the point of view of their time. Strauss concludes that both “facile delusions” amount to the same misguided belief “that we are, or can be, wiser than the wisest men of the past.” That is, either out of an almost sub-conscious belief in progress, or from the related thesis of historical perspectivism, we are “induced to play the part, not of attentive and docile listeners, but of impresarios or lion-tamers.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, despite the appearance of differing radically with respect to one’s approach to the greatest minds, both the belief in progress and historical

¹⁰⁰ The ‘progressivist’ position apparently corresponds to that of “lion-tamer” while the historical relativist is the “impresario”. Alan Udoff, and Walter Nicgorski have both suggested that this mention of ‘lion-tamer’ is an allusion to the first speech of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘Of the Three Metamorphoses’.

relativism result in the concealment of our need for genuinely liberating teachers.

That historicism arises at this point in Strauss' essay should not surprise us. We have seen that, due to the peculiarities of the present situation, we find ourselves in need of a certain kind of historical studies. We have lost contact with our founders, and are no longer able to provide a defense of either our political decisions (let alone our political principles), or the pursuit of a truly liberating education. Our teachers and our teachers' teachers have forgotten *their* teachers and their example. Most importantly, they have become oblivious to the need for a defense of their own pursuit of wisdom or knowledge or science -- a defense that once had to be made before a skeptical not to say hostile political community, but which now must be rediscovered and represented before a hostile and skeptical scholarly community. We are thus in need of a history of political philosophy, both for the sake of a philosophic defense of our politics, and a political defense of philosophy.

But we have been made aware that such historical studies are problematic. They present awesome challenges to whoever would undertake them: conceptual challenges which call their very feasibility into question. Secondly, they are potentially politically unpopular and unsettling, for they could well reveal how far we have deviated to our detriment from our founding principles, and how contrary to decent and healthy politics many of our policies are. Furthermore, we may be brought to see that the defense and justification of both liberal democracy and liberal education invoke and rest upon older, undemocratic and perhaps unjust foundations. Finally, excessive and inappropriate preoccupation with historical studies, even mere failure in the face of the difficulties such studies present, may lead toward the obscuring *doxa* that Strauss has here called his readers' attentions to.

Elsewhere Strauss calls such blinding and misguided opinions ‘historicism’. And while we will treat Strauss’ and, to a lesser extent, Nietzsche’s responses to the problems of history and historicism more fully in the second chapter, we cannot fail to recognize here, in the context of reflecting on education, that both thinkers draw their readers’ attentions to historicism as a serious obstacle to a liberating education.

Nietzsche introduces the challenge of historicism to a serious understanding of education in the fourth section of his Schopenhauer essay. Having enigmatically remarked that *if* coming to know one’s own age is an advantage, one should thus do so as thoroughly as possible (146/IV.1), Nietzsche turns his gaze to a prominent dogma of his age:

Of course, it would be a hundred times better if this investigation should reveal that nothing so proud and full of hope as our own age has ever before existed. And there are indeed at this moment naive people in this and that corner of the earth, in Germany for instance, who are prepared to believe such a thing, and even go so far as to assert in all seriousness that the world was put to rights a couple of years ago... (147/IV.2)

Just as Strauss’ first target is the belief that we see the world from a superior vantage point as the result of historical progress, here Nietzsche lampoons the Hegelian optimism that still lingered in the air and in the hearts of a few “supposedly thinking and honourable men”. But Strauss’ second target, a sort of historical perspectivism, is a view which emerged out of a decaying Hegelian conception of history. This position, that no individual can be “simply right”; rather, the best he could hope is to be right from his point of view is a recent radicalizing of Hegel’s transcendental historicism. However, as we have indicated, it ultimately fosters the same or a very similar negligent approach to the great books. By maintaining that we have become aware of a timeless truth unacknowledged by previous thinkers (namely that all thought -- except this thought -- is

historically conditioned), we implicitly claim superiority for our perspective, that “we are, or can be, wiser than the wisest men of the past.” In Nietzsche’s phrase, that “nothing so proud and full of hope as our own age has ever before existed.”

Whoever is seeking to answer the question of what the philosopher as educator can mean in our time has to contest this view, which is very widespread and propagated especially in our universities; he must declare: it is a downright scandal that such nauseating, idolatrous flattery can be rendered to our time by supposedly thinking and honourable men... (147/IV.2).

Nietzsche and Strauss seem to concur that the chief obstacle historicism presents to the possibility of liberating oneself from one’s own parochial ‘here and now’ through the study of the greatest minds of the past, is that it fosters and legitimizes the always problematic love of one’s own, and consequent sense of the superiority of one’s own time. Just as one must come to recognize that one’s own parochial culture may not have a monopoly on sound principles and practises, so too must we be brought to see that there is no *prima facie* necessity that the later be better. Rather, one must be open to possibly recognizing “how wretched we modern men appear when compared with the Greeks and Romans even merely in the matter of a serious understanding of the tasks of education” (131/II.2). But one is *not* open to such a possibility if one entertains the “facile delusions” of historicism. One is thus destined to remain “fettered by the chains of fear and convention.” Such views are “a proof that one no longer has the slightest notion how different the seriousness of philosophy is from the seriousness of a newspaper” (147/IV.2).

XIV The Forgotten Traditions and the Atomistic Revolution

Strauss returns now to “face our awesome situation”, which he tells us is “created

by the necessity” that we become more than “attentive and docile listeners, namely, judges” (8/8). Previously, however, we were told that the necessity of our being judges emerged directly from disagreement among the greatest minds. Now it would seem that Strauss is suggesting that the variants of historicism overlaying disagreement among the greatest minds require us to be judges. Or, alternatively, perhaps we are to see historicism emerging out of and in response to a perceived disagreement among the greatest minds, being in effect a false substitute to exercising judgment. But as a “facile delusion”, historicism actually leaves us in the same situation that it emerged out of. We will have ample opportunity to treat these matters more fully in the subsequent chapter.

Strauss offers the explanation that “the cause of this situation [necessitating that we be judges] is that we have lost all simply authoritative traditions in which we could trust, the *nomos* which gave us authoritative guidance, because our immediate teachers and teachers’ teachers believed in the possibility of the simply rational society” (8/8). Recalling the first paragraph, however, the implication of this explanation would seem to be that “the greatest minds” (or “teachers who are not in turn pupils”) do not endorse such a belief. This peculiar account of the cause of our finding ourselves *by necessity* obliged to try to become judges of the conversation between the greatest minds, apparently reintroduces the aforementioned analogy between the polity and liberal education. We must become judges because we have lost our faith in an authoritative tradition that in effect made such judgments for us. In short, ‘God is Dead’.

As we have seen above, we have lost contact with our “founders, gods, sons of gods or pupils of gods”. These founders provided the architecture within which most people lived out their lives. But, with the loss of these authoritative traditions and the authority of certain *nomois*, Strauss warns, “Each of us here is compelled to find his

bearings by his own powers". Like the illiterate society ruled by ancestral customs that it has no means of verifying (and thus can have no confidence in), we are left without *nomoī* which judge for us, and so we each must judge for ourselves.¹⁰¹ We have been intellectually atomized. And so what was once a mad compulsion felt by a few perhaps divinely possessed individuals, to attempt to replace trust in opinions with knowledge, has now been thrust upon all of us.

In section four of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche identifies our age as that of social atomism and asks "what are the smallest indivisible basic constituents of human society?" (150/IV.5) Leading up to this conclusion he notes, as does Strauss, the decline of religion: "The waters of religion are ebbing away and leaving behind swamps or stagnant pools" (148/IV.4). Next, like Strauss, he focuses on the sciences, "pursued without any restraint and in a spirit of the blindest *laissez-faire*, are shattering and dissolving all firmly held belief" (148/IV.4). Left with no faith, modern man feels within himself only the "self-seeking worm and currish fear" (150/IV.6).

How, pray tell, did we come to be in a situation whereby we all must become judges of those whom we have no competence to judge? "Because our immediate teachers and teachers' teachers believed in the possibility of the simply rational society." Recall in the third paragraph of the essay Strauss defined a certain version of democracy as just such a society: "a regime in which all or most adults are men of virtue, and since virtue seems to require wisdom, a regime in which all or most adults are virtuous and wise, or the society in which all or most adults have developed their reason to a high degree, or *the rational society*" (4/3). Thus, with the collapse of the enlightenment project to make of democracy a "universal aristocracy", we are left with nothing. Elsewhere Strauss labors to show that it was the enlightenment attack on orthodoxy which culminated in

¹⁰¹ In both Locke's and Hobbes' portrait of the state of nature, each individual is judge for himself.

contemporary atheism.¹⁰² Earlier we learned that an awareness of a plurality of cultures has undermined our faith in our own cultural standards. Whatever objects of reverence that are not touched by these forces are surely undermined by the general ascendancy of modern science and radical historicism. By thus aiming for a society of universal literacy, nay universal judgment of the highest order, the enlightenment architects of modern democracy have created the conditions for universal illiteracy. Earlier Strauss remarked that “every voter knows that modern democracy stands or falls by literacy”. Is democracy on the verge of falling? What is to be done?

In ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’, Strauss expands on the present theme at some length. “In the light of the original conception of modern republicanism, our present predicament appears to be caused by the decay of the religious education of the people and by the decay of the liberal education of the representatives of the people.”¹⁰³ We must notice, however, that while the enlightenment architects of modern democracy held forth the promise of “universal aristocracy”, Strauss limits himself to describing liberal education as “the necessary endeavor to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society”. In ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’ he warns that “[w]e must not expect that liberal education will ever become universal education. It will always remain the obligation and privilege of a minority”. Is Strauss then an enemy of democracy?

We are not permitted to be the flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy. While we are not permitted to remain silent on the dangers to which democracy exposes itself as well as human excellence, we cannot forget the obvious fact that by giving freedom to all, democracy also gives freedom to those who care for human excellence. No one prevents us from cultivating our garden...¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² “Orthodoxy actually had no share in the world created by the Enlightenment and its heirs, the world of ‘modern culture’; if it remained true to itself, it did not even have access to this world; it survived the nineteenth century as a misunderstood relic of a forgotten past, more despised than wondered at” (p31, *Philosophy and Law*).

¹⁰³ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p24.

XV Philosophy as World-Redeeming

As ‘What is Liberal Education?’ winds to a conclusion, Strauss turns away from the political to speak of philosophy, whose relationship to liberal education has not yet been fully clarified in this essay. He warns that philosophy “must be on guard against the wish to be edifying”¹⁰⁵, other than being “intrinsically edifying”. Presumably as an example of intrinsic edification, Strauss chooses Aristotle’s ‘description’ of *noesis noeseos*, which “is so high, so pure, so noble an experience that Aristotle could ascribe it to his God.” This may well be the paradigm of intrinsic edification. To understand our own understanding is to be truly liberated from any and all reliance outside of one’s self. “This experience is entirely independent of whether what we understand primarily is pleasing or displeasing, fair or ugly. It leads us to realize that all evils are in a sense necessary if there is to be understanding.” Surely this must qualify as intrinsic edification. For, as a way of life, philosophy is potentially bereft of any other comforts, if indeed the truth is displeasing and ugly, or forever elusive. As Strauss remarks elsewhere, “In spite of its highness or nobility, [philosophy] could appear as Sisyphean or ugly, when one contrasts its achievement with its goal. Yet it is necessarily accompanied, sustained and elevated by *eros*. It is graced by nature’s grace.”¹⁰⁶

Through such philosophic experiences we are enabled “to accept all evils which befall us”, evils “which may well break our hearts in the spirit of good citizens of the city of God.” Indeed, through such experiences we may well come to a conclusion similar to that of the unnamed but foremost theorist of democracy Strauss cited in paragraph three: “If there were a people consisting of gods, it would rule itself democratically. A government of such perfection is not suitable for human beings.” Recall that on Strauss’

¹⁰⁵ Alluding to, if not quoting Hegel.

¹⁰⁶ *What is Political Philosophy?*, p40.

account, the regime of which we are citizens was founded on the belief in or hope of the rational society, a regime which is subsequently likened to a city unsuitable to any but gods. Insofar as we remain citizens attached to this city, to say nothing of lesser cities, we are open to having our hearts broken.¹⁰⁷ Philosophy, then, is at odds with good citizenship -- even, or perhaps especially, citizenship in the city of God, be it Augustine's or Kant's.¹⁰⁸

Such difficult and discomfiting thoughts, thoughts which offer the citizen no consolation, may nonetheless be life and world-redeeming to the one who has them. For it is through such experiences, experiences of the highest, purest and *noblest* kind, that "we realize the true ground of the dignity of man and therewith the goodness of the world, whether we understand it as created or as uncreated, which is the home of man because it is the home of the human mind." Which is as much as to say that the world is left 'unredeemed' in the absence of such experiences. The mere continued existence of humankind does not itself redeem the world. For without experiences of the highest kind, we will be presented with the spectacle of cruelty and violence and suffering -- the evils of the world -- with no accompanying vindication of the world. Notice, however, that such experiences are not wisdom per se, which may ultimately prove as elusive as the ideal of democracy, but are rather the experiences of the philosopher, the *quester* after wisdom, or "knowledge of the most important, the highest, or the most comprehensive things". For as Strauss had remarked in connection with Plato, "But wisdom is inaccessible to man, and hence virtue and happiness will always be imperfect". Bearing

¹⁰⁷ In discussing Aristotle's views on citizenship, Strauss remarks, in uncharacteristically poetic language, "A mother loves her child because he is her own; she loves what is her own. But she also loves the good. All human love is subject to the law that it be both love of one's own and love of the good, and there is necessarily a tension between one's own and the good, a tension which may well lead to a break, be it only the breaking of a heart" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p35).

¹⁰⁸ But, paradoxically, if we are willing to forego our citizenship for the sake of understanding our understanding, we may ourselves participate in the experiences of Aristotle's God, and thus ourselves enter the city of the gods.

this assertion in mind, we have presented a wide variety of textual evidence suggesting that Strauss may regard the “greatest minds” as quasi-divine. Thus when he asserts that Aristotle, “could ascribe [such experiences] to his God”, we may well be led to wonder who this God is, such that he shares experiences with the philosopher, and whether this implies that the gods do philosophize.¹⁰⁹

The notion of philosophy as world-redemptive, and the philosopher as quasi-divine is so conspicuous in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that it is difficult *not* to notice. As early as the third section, Nietzsche raises the question of whether the philosopher as judge and evaluator of existence can finally affirm the goodness of existence. Here, in discussing Empedocles and the other great philosophers of the same era, and in particular their answer to the question of the value of existence as such, Nietzsche informs us that “if we listen carefully -- they are all saying the same thing.” Of course, ‘listening carefully’ here means ‘reading with the proper care’. He then articulates what question the great minds of antiquity and Schopenhauer univocally answer:

No, genius itself is now summoned, so that one may hear whether genius, the highest fruit of life, can perhaps justify life as such; the glorious, creative human being is now to answer the question: ‘Do you affirm this existence in the depths of your heart? Is it sufficient for you? Would you be its advocate, its redeemer? For you have only to pronounce a single heartfelt Yes! -- and life, though it faces such heavy accusations, shall go free.’ -- What answer will he give? (146/III.9)

Nietzsche postpones addressing this all important question until the fifth section of the essay. Here, after informing his readers that Schopenhauer is painted as a “Platonic ideal”, Nietzsche speaks of the senseless suffering of the animals. Animals suffer from life and yet are unable “to understand their existence metaphysically” (157/V.3). The

¹⁰⁹ Strauss draws attention to Nietzsche’s depiction of Socrates as “a man of more than human size, a demigod” (p7, *Socrates and Aristophanes*).

animal seeks satisfaction, suffers to attain it, holds it only momentarily, soon forgets that it ever found it and is compelled to seek it again, until it dies. With such a portrait of animal existence in mind, Nietzsche asserts that “if all nature presses towards man, it thereby intimates that man is necessary for the redemption of nature” (157/V.3) for man can, by holding a mirror up to nature,¹¹⁰ come to bestow on nature a metaphysical significance.

But in the moments that we do come to realize this, we must also recognize that we are for the most part ourselves akin to the animals, and that “we are pressing towards man as towards something that stands high above us” (158/V.4). Indeed, we come to see most human activity and history as but the continuation of animality. It almost seems as if nature withdrew suddenly from its own redemption, preferring a return “to the unconsciousness of instinct” (158/V.4). And if we come to think of ourselves as “too weak to endure those moments of profoundest contemplation” (159/V.5), we may come to regard “those true *men*, those who are no longer animal, the philosophers, artists and saints” as the goal towards which nature has worked. Nature realizes that it “has to unlearn having goals”. “This knowledge transfigures nature, and a gentle evening-weariness, that which men call ‘beauty’ reposes upon its face” (159/V.6).

As to the divinity of the educating philosopher, Nietzsche introduces this possibility virtually at the outset of his essay, remarking that “There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would bear you through [the stream of life]” (129/I.3). Later, in discussing the constitutional dangers to which genius is exposed, particularly in the modern era, Nietzsche proclaims, “Yet there will always be demi-gods

¹¹⁰ This famous and much commented on formula from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is but one of several subtle allusions to another philosopher-artist, or Platonic political philosopher, namely Shakespeare. Later in this same section Nietzsche will approvingly cite Goethe’s remark “I have often said and shall often repeat that the *causa finalis* of the activities of men and the world is dramatic poetry. For the stuff is of absolutely no other use” (160/V.8).

who can endure to live, and live victoriously, under such terrible conditions” (140/III.3).

In asking who the “spirit-voices” are who lift us up out of the stream of becoming and “the whole dreamlike condition in which we live”, he concludes, “They are those true *men, those who are no longer animal, the philosophers, artists and saints*” (159/V.6). Finally, it would seem that Nietzsche, like Strauss, has taken this view of the “greatest minds” from Plato, whose regime ruled by philosopher-kings Nietzsche describes as “the rule of the ‘sons of god’” (183/VIII.2).

In sum, Nietzsche, just as Strauss, regards philosophy as potentially painful and comfortless. The potentially dark truths and bleak insights one may come to hold are made bearable only through the high, pure and noble or beautiful experience of becoming fully aware of our own understanding. Such experiences may lead us “to realize that all evils are in a sense necessary if there is to be understanding.” One must embrace the whole human fate:

The tremendous coming and going of men on the great wilderness of the earth, their founding of cities and states, their wars, their restless assembling and scattering again, their confused mingling, mutual imitation, mutual outwitting and downtreading, their wailing in distress, their howls of joy in victory (158/V.4)

-- all this becomes acceptable, vindicated by this metaphysical understanding. And by thus “becoming aware of the dignity of the human mind, we realize the true ground of the dignity of man and therewith the goodness of the world... which is the home of man because it is the home of the human mind”. As Nietzsche describes it, “nothing better or happier can befall a man than to be in the proximity of one of those victors who, precisely because they have thought most deeply, must love what is most living and, as sages, incline in the end to the beautiful” (136/II.7).

XVI Liberal Education and the Beautiful

Liberal education, now described as “constant intercourse with the greatest minds”, is “training in the highest form of modesty, not to say of humility.” That is, constant intercourse with the greatest minds is and should be humbling, for it sets our own self-cultivation against the highest possible standard. In such greatest minds, the true goal of culture properly understood, as well as nature, properly understood, attain their fulfillment. Thus both Strauss and Nietzsche have acknowledged that understanding the philosopher as the goal of education and culture is daunting. Strauss humbly admits that “we cannot be philosophers, but we can love philosophy; we can try to philosophize” and Nietzsche similarly remarks that “we are not the mankind towards which all nature presses for its redemption”.

Yet, Strauss stresses, such education is “at the same time a training in boldness”.¹¹¹ “It demands from us the complete break with the noise, the rush, the thoughtlessness” that characterize our modern democracy generally. Nietzsche too focuses on “the haste and the hurry now universal, of the increasing velocity of life, of the cessation of all contemplativeness and simplicity”. He is particularly attuned to the peculiar ‘noisiness’ of modern life: “we deafen ourselves with sociability”. Strauss and Nietzsche concur that true education cultivates the boldness to break with intellectual fashions and anti-intellectual prejudices, as well as “the resolve to regard the accepted views as mere opinions, or to regard the average opinions as extreme opinions”. In Nietzsche’s language, “the educated classes are no longer lighthouses or refuges in the midst of this turmoil of secularization; they themselves grow daily more restless, thoughtless and loveless.” Strauss, we recall, has already likened the predominant view among political scientists to

¹¹¹ Strauss describes philosophy as “the highest form of the mating of courage and moderation” (*What is Political Philosophy*, p40).

the extreme view. Here he goes so far in this concluding paragraph to assert that average opinions are “at least as likely to be wrong as the most strange and least popular opinions.” We cannot fail to consider such an assertion simply because it seems platitudinous. It implies, with respect to the universal presupposition in favor of liberal democracy for example, that such *doxa* are as “at least as likely to be wrong” as the most bizarre alternatives.

At the conclusion of his brief but remarkably dense essay, Strauss returns to a definition of liberal education which he offered earlier in his essay: liberal education is “education to perfect gentlemanship”, or what Xenophon described Socrates as leading his fellow readers towards. We noted in discussing that passage that the word for gentlemanship means literally, noble, or beautiful, and good. Here Strauss calls liberal education, “liberation from vulgarity” invoking the Greek word for vulgarity -- *apeirokalia* -- calling it beautiful. The word means literally “lack of experience in things beautiful”. “Liberal education”, Strauss tells his readers, “supplies us with experience in things beautiful”.

If we are to take this as Strauss’ final, comprehensive answer to the guiding question of this essay, however, we seem to be left with the question, ‘What is Beautiful?’ or, since the Greek word Strauss here translates as beautiful could also be noble, “What is Noble?”. Strauss answers this question elsewhere:

The works of the great writers of the past are very beautiful even from without. And yet their visible beauty is sheer ugliness, compared with the beauty of those hidden treasures which disclose themselves only after very long, never easy, but always pleasant work. This always difficult, but always pleasant work is, I believe, what the philosophers had in mind when they recommended education.¹¹²

Thus, here in the final paragraph, all the various encapsulations of liberal

¹¹² *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p37. Cf, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, p174.

education offered over the course of the essay as a whole come together. Liberal education is education in perfect gentlemanship, it is the highest cultivation of our natures, it is antithetical to both vulgarity and dogmatism, and points emphatically towards the philosopher as its ultimate aim.

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INTERLUDE

Thus far we have seen that Strauss' meditations on education owe much, both structurally and conceptually, to Nietzsche's "untimely" consideration of Schopenhauer. Strauss and Nietzsche seem to concur that, like agriculture, education as an activity only makes sense teleologically and that the goal which guides education or cultivation is the re-production of the philosopher. Both thinkers also seem to share the view that philosophic reflection is the highest possible activity and contains within it world-redemptive, metaphysical significance. With the advent of modernity, however, such an education, at least its preliminary and preparatory stages, has become historical in character. The quest for models and helpers in one's own project of self-fulfillment lead one, by necessity, to return to the original foundational thinkers who themselves show the way to such experiences. Strauss and Nietzsche also seem to agree that Socrates is the ultimate founder of the philosophic endeavor, at least in the West. Socrates, however, is a problematic model for a number of reasons. Firstly, he himself has written nothing, but is a character unknown outside of the artistic creations of Plato, Xenophon and Aristophanes, none of whom can claim *prima facie* to present the authoritative account. Moreover, Socrates himself is a pupil of earlier thinkers, thinkers whose writings have not come down to us intact, and yet somehow he has become the very exemplar of a "teacher who is not in turn a pupil". Finally, Socrates, and thus a life modeled upon Socrates, is in a tense, not to say hostile, relationship with his political community. Nietzsche's portrait of Schopenhauer is similarly problematic, but in crafting such a portrait, Nietzsche may be pointing beyond his Socratic Schopenhauer, to the creative efforts of the Platonic political philosopher as the resolution of "The Problem of Socrates".

Perhaps more pressingly, however, is the tension between philosophy and history

which the necessity for a return to the foundations of Western rationalism introduces.

Philosophy is not an historical activity, though apparently it now requires historical studies as preparatory¹. We have seen that both Strauss and Nietzsche conspicuously call their readers' attentions to the apparently unphilosophic task of coming to know one's "here and now". By juxtaposing one's own age to other, more philosophically fruitful ages -- in particular the ancient Greeks -- these ancillary historical studies become the means of recognizing what in our own world is inimical to the growth of the philosopher. An excessive or misdirected preoccupation with history, however, tends towards beliefs, *doxa*, which are antithetical to and undermining of the philosophic effort: historicism. Both Nietzsche and Strauss call particular attention to our deep-seated and thoroughly modern belief in progress and the superiority of our vantage point. Thus we turn to Nietzsche's reflections on *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* to clarify in what manner, to what extent and in what spirit these now necessary historical studies are to be undertaken.

As we have seen, however, Strauss has crafted a carefully considered analogy between politics and philosophy with regard to the need for historical education. Only a generation by generation re-presentation of a founder's teaching can ensure that the heirs of a tradition, be it political or philosophic (or poli-philosophic), do not unconsciously deviate to their detriment from the intent of their founding fathers. Moreover, in the wake of the decline in religious education and the diffusion, popularization and ascendancy of the modern scientific understanding, the only hope for securing a moral defense of and justifiable preference for liberal democracy is to be sought in and through a

¹ As Strauss indicates elsewhere, this need for historical studies is requisite even to those who would seek to overthrow and shirk the burden of Western rationalism in favor of a new kind of thinking.

renewed conception of liberal education. This, it seems, is what Strauss means by describing liberal education as the effort to found an aristocracy within modern democracy. The further degeneration of modern democracy towards mass culture and mass rule can only be slowed through liberal education and the cultivation of responsible, nay virtuous gentlemen who will bear the burden of political authority, setting the moral tone of modern democracy in the least ambiguous way. In Nietzschean language, sooner or later we must stop merely spending our moral capital, and begin creating some, or at the very least reinvesting it.

Nor is Strauss alone in making such claims. Many commentators have attributed the contemporary crisis in the liberal West to a betrayal of the intellectual class. Strauss seems to suggest in his essays on liberal education, and elsewhere, that only a renewed commitment to a revitalized liberal education which cultivates both independence and political responsibility can stop this decline. Liberal education is crucial.

But we have seen that liberal education is importantly historical in character and that misunderstandings of the implications of this need for history have given rise to historicism and cultural relativism. These misbegotten doxa only tend to the further erosion of liberal education as a salutary political force. History and historical education, necessary but apparently dangerous, emerge as problems for modern democracy. And so, both for the vitality of philosophy in our time, and the health of modern democracy, we find ourselves compelled to seek clarification of our relationship with history and the peculiar difficulties historical education presents.

At the outset, however, we noted that to a large extent our present endeavor is itself importantly historical or scholarly in character. We thus must clarify what our

scholarly hopes are in turning from Strauss and Nietzsche on education to Strauss and Nietzsche on history. I doubt that any informed commentator would deny that a concern with both history and education centrally inform Strauss' own scholarly and philosophic efforts. We have heard his explicit statement that "education is in a sense the subject matter of my teaching and research" and we have noted that his efforts in this vein were primarily directed towards initiating a renaissance in the serious study of the history of political philosophy. Thus, devoted to preparing the ground for an *education* in the philosophic *history* of philosophy, it may not be an exaggeration to assert that Strauss' teachings on history and education are weight-bearing beams in the house that Strauss has built. To find Nietzsche lurking within the nooks and knots of these pillars, perhaps even contributing to the architecture and aesthetics of the whole project, would thus be tantamount to uncovering the Nietzschean building plan behind Strauss' carpentry.

Thus to conclude this brief interlude, we may boldly assert that for political, philosophic and scholarly purposes we are compelled to turn our gaze, or rather narrow our focus from education generally to the questionable character of historical education: its uses and disadvantages for political philosophy. Of course, beneath our bold boast is the humble hope that we have also successfully managed to place our own scholarly and historical efforts in the service of an elucidation of a genuinely important problem of political philosophy.

CHAPTER II

ON THE USES AND DISADVANTAGES OF HISTORY FOR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

I am attempting to be helpful to those who are worthy of being introduced to the study of philosophy in an opportune and serious manner. This attempt may or may not be successful and I am only too well aware that it can be outstripped; and there is nothing I desire more, for the good of that philosophy, than to be imitated and surpassed.

Nietzsche

Prolegomena to Nietzsche and Strauss on History

Leo Strauss wrote and published three essays specifically on history and historicism. Following in the German post-Hegelian tradition, Strauss identifies the crisis brought on by certain trends in the study of history as ‘historicism’. By ‘historicism’ Strauss means the alleged insight that all human thought is essentially and incorrigibly related to the historical context from which it emerged. It is the view that one cannot escape the ‘cave’ of one’s temporal situation to ascertain any trans-historical or unhistorical truths.

Though he wrote only three essays explicitly devoted to historicism so understood, Strauss regarded historicism as the most pressing or urgent threat posed to the possibility of philosophy in modern times. Not only did historicism imply that the goal of philosophy, in particular political philosophy, was unattainable, but it presented an allegedly insurmountable obstacle to anyone who would attempt to rethink the thought of past thinkers. As we have seen in reflecting on Strauss’ remarks on education, a concern with keeping open the possibility of philosophy is at the very heart of Strauss’ lifelong commitment to teaching. Furthermore, we have also seen that on Strauss’ view the study of past thought is essential to philosophizing today. It is perhaps, then, no surprise that Strauss should be so concerned with historicism.

With respect to Strauss’ relationship to Nietzsche, one curiosity stands out in Strauss’ three essays on history: he explicitly refers to Nietzsche’s *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* in two of these writings, but not in the one that would seem the closest to his own vital interest: ‘Political Philosophy and History’. This is all the more curious once one recognizes the crucial position Nietzsche occupies in the other two essays. In the first chapter of *Natural Right and History*, where the chief target is

Heideggerian historicism, Strauss introduces Nietzsche at the pivotal point where “nineteenth century historicism” is transformed into “radical historicism”. Nietzsche is credited with attacking the former, and preparing the way for the latter. Strauss’ discussion of the either-or choice Nietzsche presented future philosophers in his *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* fails, however, to identify Nietzsche conclusively with either of the two sides of this monumental choice.¹

In his essay on ‘On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History’, Strauss presents Collingwood as “vacillat[ing] between two different views of history, the rationalistic view of Hegel, and a non-rationalistic view.” On Strauss’ view, Collingwood “never clearly realized that these two views are mutually incompatible” and that “the historical reason for this failure was his lack of acquaintance with Nietzsche’s epoch-making critique of ‘scientific history.’”²

Seeing the apparent importance with which Strauss invests Nietzsche’s essay in these two other writings,³ and the importance Strauss himself ascribes to answering the challenge of historicism, we are, it would seem, warranted in examining ‘Political Philosophy and History’ with Nietzsche’s essay in mind.

I The Project

Nietzsche’s *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* is much more than a scholarly critique of the modernity. It is a call to arms, a mustering of forces, the announcement of a truly monumental project; nothing less than the refounding of culture. This “meditation on the value of history” begins with Nietzsche citing Goethe’s declaration that he hates what “merely instructs me without augmenting or directly

¹ *Natural Right and History*, p26.

² ‘On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History’, p563.

³ And elsewhere, see Introduction.

invigorating my activity” (59/F.1),⁴ adopting it as his own *ceterum censeo* to the Senate of what he will later call “the empire of youth”. Nietzsche is ‘of the opinion’ that the expanding regime of history -- the thoughtless accumulation of useless masses of information about other times and societies -- must be destroyed. He contends that “we still lack even the things we need”, and that our luxurious indulgence in history “is the enemy of the necessary”. We do need history, perhaps of an altogether new kind and to an unprecedented degree, but “only to the extent that history serves life”. For, as the manifold symptoms of our age indicate, life can degenerate through an excess of history.

Like the Cato after whom Nietzsche models this exhortation,⁵ Nietzsche is “constantly tormented” by the threat he feels as a result of what he is to depict, and he too intends to revenge “[him]self upon it by handing it over to the public.” Perhaps his depiction will strike a responsive chord in some individuals but Nietzsche fully realizes that most of his contemporaries, proud of their historical consciousness, will regard his

⁴ As in Chapter I, I will cite Nietzsche’s essay *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, as it appears in the Cambridge University Press edition of the *Untimely Meditations*, by page number followed by section and paragraph numbers. ‘F’ in this case indicates ‘Foreword’. All italics will be Nietzsche’s and all underlining my own.

⁵ Nietzsche later mentions Plutarch in the essay, so it may perhaps be warranted to reexamine Nietzsche’s *ceterum censeo* in light of Marcus Cato’s. Firstly we should notice that Marcus Cato was exceedingly strict in his “censorship” of his fellow Romans (XIX.1-2). In spite of this he was commemorated with the inscription: “that when the Roman state was tottering to its fall, he was made censor, and by helpful guidance, wise restraints, and sound teachings, restored it again” (XIX.2). Moreover, Cato was a harsh critic of Socrates holding that “there was nothing else to admire in Socrates of old except that he was always kind and gentle in his intercourse with a shrewish wife and stupid sons” (XX.1), and that “Socrates was a mighty Prattler, who attempted, as best he could, to be his country’s tyrant, by abolishing its customs, and by enticing his fellow citizens into opinions contrary to the laws” (XXIII.1). Quoted from the Bernadotte Perrin translation in the Loeb Classical Library.

feeling as “perverse, unnatural, detestable and wholly impermissible”.⁶

Nietzsche’s rhetoric, here and throughout the essay, is directed primarily at the youth with the aim of luring and goading them into action. Nowhere is this more evident than in his repeated calls for a hundred “fighters against their age”. The first of these occurs, tellingly, in his discussion of ‘monumental’ history:

Supposing someone believed that it would require no more than a hundred men educated and actively working in a new spirit to do away with the bogus form of culture which has just now become the fashion in Germany, how greatly it would strengthen him to realize that the culture of the Renaissance was raised on the shoulders of just such a band of a hundred men (69/ II.3).

To be sure, Nietzsche warns that our understanding of the past -- in this case the Renaissance -- will necessarily have to suffer distortion if this example is to inspire:

that which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest events, must also be repeated on earth: so that whenever the stars stand in a certain relation to one another a Stoic again joins with an Epicurean to murder Caesar, and when they stand in another relation, Columbus will again discover America (70/II.4).

Nietzsche will later describe modern science as a star -- a star that is “mighty and hostile”,

⁶ Nietzsche’s *ceterum censeo* against the contemporary excess of history so closely parallels Cato’s own *ceterum censeo* that it is worth pointing out some key points of similarity. Upon his arrival in Carthage, Cato “found the city by no means in a poor and lowly state, as the Romans supposed, but rather teeming with vigorous fighting men, overflowing with enormous wealth, filled with arms of every sort and with military supplies, and not a little puffed up by all this.” Cato supposed “that unless [the Romans] should repress a city which had always been their malignant foe, now that its power was so incredibly grown, they would be involved again in dangers as great as before” (XXVI.2-3). Note that Cato ended every speech to the Senate with this *ceterum censeo*, and that Nietzsche declares that he is “constantly tormented” by his concern with history. Notice also that whenever Cato pronounced his *ceterum censeo* (“I am of the opinion, Carthage must be destroyed”), Scipio Nasica would always declare his opinion to the contrary believing that Carthage would never be strong enough to overcome Rome, just as Nietzsche warns that most of his contemporaries will view his feeling as inappropriate. In Plutarch’s account, the life paralleled by Marcus Cato is that of Aristides ‘The Just’. Notice the centrality of the concern with justice in Nietzsche’s essay. Finally, notice that Nietzsche concludes his essay with a prophesy that the then young would rise up and save us from the excesses of history we currently suffer from. In Plutarch’s *Lives* the account of Marcus Cato virtually ends with his prophesizing that the then young Scipio would save Rome from the threat of Carthage -- the same Scipio who would in turn be vanquished by the young Caesar who brought the republic to an end.

but also “gleaming and glorious” -- which has interposed itself in the constellation of life and history (77/IV.2). And he will begin the concluding section of his essay by declaring, “Land! Land! Enough and more than enough of the wild and erring voyage over strange and dark seas! At last a coast appears in sight: we must land on it whatever it may be like, and the worst of harbours is better than to go reeling back into a hopeless infinity of scepticism” (116/X.1). Further, his call for the ascendancy of the “empire of youth” (116/IX.9) as well as his invocation of Marcus Cato, indicates that he too has in mind a repetition of Caesar’s achievement.

All of these illustrious examples -- the destruction of barbarian Carthage, the Renaissance, Caesar, the discovery of America -- are monumental in scale and thus give some indication of the character of the project announced in this essay.

This theme of a ‘hundred fighters’ is echoed in his recommending that one read only biographies subtitled: ““a fighter against his age””, citing Plutarch’s biographies in particular:

Satiate your soul with Plutarch and when you believe in his heroes dare at the same time to believe in yourself. With a hundred such men -- raised in this unmodern way, that is to say become mature and accustomed to the heroic --the whole noisy sham culture of our age could now be silenced for ever. -- (95/VI.8)

Finally, in the hope-filled tenth section, Nietzsche indicates that the project may already be underway insofar as “there are perhaps now a hundred more people than there were a hundred years ago that know what poetry is; perhaps a hundred years hence there will be a further hundred who by then will have also learned what culture is” (117/X.2).

The project of the hundred, as is apparent from the above examples, has a use for both ‘monumental’ and ‘critical’ history. Whereas monumental history serves as inspiration to man as he “acts and strives” to construct and create, critical history

pertains to man as he “suffers and seeks deliverance” (67/II.1) from a past that is oppressive and stultifying in the present. Nietzsche is clear that such monumental - critical projects are to be undertaken only by “an architect of the future” who also knows the present (94/VI.8). For “if the historical drive does not also contain a drive to construct, if the purpose of destroying and clearing is not to allow a future already alive in anticipation to raise its house on the ground thus liberated, if justice alone prevails, then the instinct for creation will be enfeebled and discouraged” (95/VII.1).

The future for the sake of which this monumental project is to be undertaken is distinctly ancient, one may say, antique. Moreover, it is worth noting that the examples of illustrious forerunners in such undertakings are preserved for us, thus available to inspire us, thanks in part to the ‘antiquarian’ mode of history -- that mode of history for man as he “preserves and reveres”. As Nietzsche himself notes:

If history in general were nothing more than ‘the world-system of passion and error’, mankind would have to read it as Goethe advised his readers to read *Werther*: as if it called to them ‘be a man and do not follow after me!’ Fortunately, however, it also preserves the memory of the great fighters *against history* (106/VIII.6).

What most of all justifies the historical record, on Nietzsche’s account, is that it includes a history of the untimely -- a record of monumental acts, tended with antiquarian care, for sake of possible critical use in the future. This synthesis of critical, antiquarian and monumental uses of history becomes essential to the solution Nietzsche proposes and Strauss takes up.

Although Nietzsche in effect proposes this grandest of projects, he voices some trepidation about his own account. In the Foreword, for instance, he would seem to waver: “Perhaps this depiction [of the threat posed by excessive history] will inspire someone or other to tell me that he too knows this feeling but that I have not felt it in its

pure and elemental state and have certainly not expressed it with the assurance that comes from mature experience" (59/F.2). Similarly, upon having given his curious and apparently inadequate account of the origin of the historical sense, and attributed to the moderns a lack of generosity, he acknowledges,

Perhaps this observation will not be very acceptable, perhaps as unacceptable as my derivation of our excess of history from the medieval *memento mori* and the hopelessness with regard to all coming ages of human existence which Christianity bears in its heart. If so, you might try to replace this explanation, which I offer only with some hesitation, with a better one (102/VIII.2).

Finally, in the concluding section Nietzsche confesses that "the present treatise itself reveals its modern character" and all the weaknesses that entails (116/X.2). Whatever else, this rhetoric of uncertainty plays to the young, encouraging them to take up Nietzsche's project for themselves, as full partners, and work to fill it out and in.

What, more precisely, is Nietzsche's project, and how is it to be undertaken? Nietzsche is far from direct in indicating what it will consist of, but a re-reading of the essay with this question in mind reveals several fairly clear pronouncements of what must be done, and how it is to be accomplished.

For instance, upon turning his attention to the relation between life and history in the present, and prior to his focusing directly upon the Germans, Nietzsche remarks:

He who wants to strive for and promote the culture of a people should strive for and promote this higher unity and join in the destruction of modern bogus cultivatedness for the sake of a true culture; he should venture to reflect how the health of a people undermined by the study of history may again be restored, how it may again rediscover its instincts and therewith its honesty (80/IV.3).

Though encouraging, such formal remarks hardly provide a blueprint for the destructive undertaking, much less for the healthy future lying in anticipation. The destructive

component of the project -- the critical use of history -- is outlined in the eighth section, after Nietzsche has once again voiced his hesitation and reluctance with respect to his own account. He offers this challenge to whoever remains unsatisfied with Nietzsche's own explanation of the emergence of the contemporary excess of history:

you might try to replace this explanation, which I offer only with some hesitation, with a better one; for the origin of historical culture -- its quite radical conflict with the spirit of any 'new age', any 'modern awareness' -- this origin *must* itself be known historically, history *must* itself resolve the problem of history, knowledge *must* turn its sting against itself -- this threefold *must* is the imperative of the 'new age', supposing this age does contain anything new, powerful, original and promising more life (102-3/VIII.2).

This three-fold must is thus the central manifesto for Nietzsche's Second Great Instauration. But, as Nietzsche himself notes, the three distinct kinds of history serve different needs. How are we to determine what form of history to use when and in what measure? As Laurence Lampert has rightly noted in his brief but most insightful exposition of Nietzsche's second 'untimely one', the remedy to the current excess of history entails a fusion of all three forms of history, somewhat as indicated in speaking of Nietzsche's larger project.⁷ As we will endeavor to make clear in what follows, however, this lesser fusion, is to be deployed under the supervision of a still higher fusion -- called 'medicine' or 'antidote' by Nietzsche, and 'remedy' by Strauss -- the fusion of the 'suprahistorical' and the 'unhistorical'.

In short, we will endeavor to demonstrate that Strauss enlists in Nietzsche's one hundred and takes up Nietzsche's challenge to provide an adequate historical account and critique of the historical excesses of our time. Strauss, we will argue, follows Nietzsche's lead in most all respects, though sometimes concealing what Nietzsche reveals, at other times revealing what Nietzsche leaves half concealed.

⁷Nietzsche and Modern Times p286-9.

Nietzsche plays upon his own youthfulness, and his targeted audience's youthfulness throughout the essay. He juxtaposes his and his audience's youth to the "inborn grey-hairedness" of his contemporaries. Parallel to this juxtaposition between 'naive' youth and 'experienced' maturity if not agedness, is a similar treatment of 'world history'. From the then reigning Hegelian perspective, the world was well into its mature adulthood, if not on the cusp of old age. Not only that, but (according to Nietzsche) young men are made grey-haired through their historical and scholarly education (115/IX.9). Against this premature aging, Nietzsche advocates a return to youth. He seeks to overthrow the dominant cynicism which holds that nothing new is possible -- that we are living in the old-age of the world -- with a wave of naive, young and hopeful rebels. Secondly, he advocates a return to the 'unhistorical', immature, and naive past as represented by the Greeks. Strauss, as we shall see, advocates precisely the same return by a "mature scholar" (35) to the "naive" non-historical philosophy" (36) of the past.

Neither Nietzsche nor Strauss are committed to return, however. Even at his young age, Nietzsche knew that there was no going backwards.⁸ Strauss too acknowledges that a simple return is an impossibility.⁹ For, in the first instance, the reigning historicism both Nietzsche and Strauss face denies the possibility of return and has done much to undercut its feasibility. This historicism must first be overthrown if there is to be anything like a return. Beyond this, however, the stronger and deeper forces which lurk behind and are in many ways responsible for historicism have made a straightforward return to pre-historicist, pre-modern thought impossible. Both Nietzsche and Strauss, we will see, confine their proposals for reform within the limits of what is

possible "in the circumstances". Granted, both Nietzsche and Strauss point to the pre-

⁸ *Twilight of the Idols*, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', no.43.

⁹ "We cannot reasonably expect that a fresh understanding of classical political philosophy will supply us with recipes for today's use. For the relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics..." *City and Man*, p11.

modern world, to antiquity, for their models and counter-examples, but both also self-consciously conceive of their projects as working towards a ‘new age’ or a ‘future philosophy’ -- as Nietzsche indicates (among other ways) through his employing the image of a voyage of discovery.

Nietzsche concludes his ‘Foreword’ by explaining the sense in which this meditation is “untimely”: “[B]ecause I am here attempting to look afresh at something of which our time is rightly proud -- its cultivation of history -- as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it” (60/F.3). We are sick with the fever of history, and need at least to recognize that we are sick if we are to have any hope of recovery.

Nietzsche, however, has somehow managed to consult a physician of sorts, and he concludes by accounting for his own unfashionable feelings: “[I]t is only to the extent that I am a pupil of earlier times, especially the Hellenic, that though a child of the present time I was able to acquire such untimely experiences.” This untimely effect, “acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come”, is the only conceivable justification “classical studies could have for our time”.

In what follows we shall endeavor to demonstrate that Strauss’ engagement with history from the vantage of political philosophy follows Nietzsche’s consideration of history from the vantage of life in, its intention: as a “meditation on the value of history”, its concern that history can stunt and degenerate life, its pointing to a still lacking need which is obscured by our superfluous use of history, its attempt to see through the paradox of seeing as a defect something of which we can be rightly proud, its use of “earlier times”, in particular the Greeks, as a context of comparison and its advocacy of classical studies as untimely and “for the benefit of a time to come”. In short, we will argue that Strauss was “inspired” by Nietzsche’s depiction to affirm that he too “knows

this feeling”, and that the project Nietzsche announces in his essay is taken up by Strauss in his.

II Provocative Beginnings

Although Strauss begins in a typically ‘matter of fact’ manner, declaring outright that “[p]olitical philosophy is not a historical discipline”, Strauss -- like Nietzsche -- is clearly out to provoke. As he demonstrates over the course of the essay, he is fully aware that the historicism which pervades our age is rampant in the academic discipline known by the moniker ‘political philosophy’. Indeed, Strauss later goes so far as to suggest that historicism is itself the result of a transformation in political philosophy. At the outset, however, Strauss undertakes simply to distance political philosophy from the study of the history of political philosophy, for it is the confusion of these two disparate enterprises that accounts for much of the paradoxical impact of his opening assertion. Philosophic questions about political things are not historical questions, which virtually by definition concern particular individual instances of political things. Strauss catalogs five types of individual things addressed by historical questions: “individual groups, individual human beings, individual achievements, individual ‘civilizations’, the one individual ‘process’ of human civilization from its beginning to the present” (56/1).¹⁰ These he juxtaposes to two overriding philosophic questions: “the nature of political things and of the best, or the just political order”. Strauss further insists that these questions “cannot possibly be mistaken” for the question of how a particular philosopher, or even all philosophers, have answered the philosophic questions, as the latter is a biographical matter, i.e., an historical question.

¹⁰ As in Chapter I, references to Strauss’s ‘Political Philosophy and History’ will be cited in the text proper, by page (as the essay appears in *What is Political Philosophy?*) and paragraph number. All italics will be Strauss’s and all underlining my own.

Nonetheless, political philosophy is not strictly independent of history. Rather, without awareness of a certain range of alternative pre-philosophic answers to the questions of “the nature of political things and of the best, or the just political order”, we are precluded from seeing these questions as actually questionable.¹¹ Moreover, history is needed to keep those philosophic questions alive, to keep political philosophy alive, by preventing us from descending into dogmatism, or an unreflective slumber, mistaking contemporary opinions for the truth. Strauss will later attribute historicism itself with being dogmatic, thus explaining his own use of history against its abuse by historicism. Thirdly, Strauss tells us that a similar relationship obtains in the need for history in the study of the history of political philosophy. That is, just as without a plurality of alternative accounts of political things the philosophic questions are not raised, so without a plurality of philosophic answers to said questions, there would be no history of philosophy to study. These remarks, however, are not to be mistaken for the view that political philosophy is itself historical. History can be important, even essential, to political philosophy without political philosophy itself being essentially historical. Strauss will endeavor to show us how.

Nietzsche begins the first section of his ‘meditation’ by suggesting that we consider the animals. Animals live utterly immersed in the moment, caring only about eating and their digestion.¹² While we humans may “wonder” at this uncanny forgetfulness of the animal, we do not have access to an eternal moment akin to that of the animal. Nietzsche thrice reminds his readers of the human’s capacity for “wonder”. They “wonder” at the animal, then at themselves, then at the comparison. More than

¹¹ “[R]ealization of the variety of notions of right is *the* incentive for the quest for natural right.” *Natural Right and History*, p10.

¹² Cf. *What is Political Philosophy?* p21.

animals, less than gods, humans wonder, and this capacity for wonder has traditionally been seen as the natural source of the philosophic impulse.¹³ Later in this first section, Nietzsche informs his readers that “only through the power of employing the past for the purposes of life and of again introducing into history that which has been done and is gone -- did man become man” (64/I.5). Just as Strauss maintains that philosophy would never have emerged without history, Nietzsche here proclaims that we only fully realized our humanity through “employing the past for the purposes of life”. Still Nietzsche goes on to warn that “with an excess of history man again ceases to exist, and without that envelope of the unhistorical he would never have begun or dared to begin” (64/I.5).

Nietzsche illustrates the importance of “forgetting” the past with the example of a man possessed by a “vehement passion, for a woman or for a great idea” and he describes this condition as “unhistorical, anti-historical through and through” (64/I.5). Later in the essay Nietzsche will liken philosophy to an “honest, naked goddess” (85/V.3), and liken the historical scholar who studies philosophers historically to eunuchs for whom “one woman is like another”, indifferent to each one’s unique charms (86/V.4). All this is by way of suggesting that, while Nietzsche’s concern with history apparently extends through all aspects of life and action, philosophy, as the highest manifestation of life, is of particular concern to him, and that he, like Strauss, sees the drive to philosophy as essentially “unhistorical”, even if it may itself rely upon and necessitate some use of history.

While most men for the most part live historically within a restricted temporal horizon, Nietzsche recognizes that there are a few who may rise above the historical, to what he calls the suprahistorical. The suprahistorical perspective emerges out of reflection upon “the unhistorical atmosphere within which every great historical event has

¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b12-14.

taken place". Such a vantage would cure one of ever "taking history too seriously"(66/I.6), for the suprahistorical men are "unanimous in the proposition" that "the past and the present are one, that is to say, with all their diversity identical in all that is typical and, as the omnipresence of imperishable types, a motionless structure of value that cannot alter and a significance that is always the same" (66/I.8). One might suppose that this essentially describes a philosophical perspective. However, Nietzsche does not say so. Indeed, he advises his readers to "leave the suprahistorical men to their nausea and their wisdom"(66/I.9). Does Nietzsche mean thereby to disavow a concern for or with philosophy?

The essential difference between the "suprahistorical" and the "unhistorical" men, on Nietzsche's view, is with regards to their willingness to act. The suprahistorical man is rendered motionless, paralyzed by his synoptic surveying of history from which he induces the ultimate futility of all human striving. The unhistorical individual, by contrast, is driven by powerful lusts and ambitions, and is oblivious to the paralyzing lesson that history teaches.¹⁴ That philosophy properly understood is not passive resignation, but intense activity is made clear in Nietzsche's warning of what results from an excess of history:

Within a historical culture philosophy possesses no rights if it wants to be more than a self-restrained knowing which leads to no action... One may think, write, print, speak, teach philosophy -- to that point more or less everything is permitted; only in the realm of action, of so-called life, is it otherwise: there only one thing is ever permitted and everything else is simply impossible: thus will historical culture have it (85/V.3).

Clearly Nietzsche here speaks for a truly vital and active philosophy, one that is not paralyzed by the "suprahistorical" insight, but that would seem to be in some sense

¹⁴ This juxtaposition of unhistorical and suprahistorical is strikingly similar to the Dionysian vitality and Greek cheerfulness in the face of the Silenic insight Nietzsche presents in the *Birth of Tragedy*.

“unhistorical” in its willingness to act. As the remedy to the contemporary excess of history, Nietzsche will later recommend a fusion of the unhistorical and the suprahistorical. In short, for Nietzsche philosophy must be more than a “disinterested contemplation of the eternal”; rather, it must be active, or, in the broadest sense of the term: political.¹⁵

With this much as general background, Nietzsche begins the second section of his essay by distinguishing three uses of history for life. “History pertains to the living man in three respects: it pertains to him as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance” (67/II.1). A careful reader of Strauss’ essay may note that he also delineates three uses that political philosophy has for history:

Without the experience of the variety of political institutions and convictions in different countries and at different times, the questions of the nature of political things and the best or just political order could never have been raised. And after they have been raised, only historical knowledge can prevent one from mistaking the specific features of the political life of one’s time and one’s country for the nature of political things. Similar considerations apply to the history of political thought and the history of political philosophy (1).

III Historicism Today

Strauss begins his deployment of history against historicism with a consideration of the historical origins of historicism. He observes that the view that history was merely auxiliary and ancillary to political philosophy “was unquestionably predominant

¹⁵ As we noted in our discussion of his meditation on education, Nietzsche attributes this purely contemplative attitude to Goethean man, and the explosive and dangerously active to Rousseauean man. There Nietzsche sought a synthesis as well, a synthesis of speech and deed, thought and action, which he attributed to Schopenhauerian man. We noted there that this fusion of contemplation and action was distinctly Socratic, and that it very much reminds one of Strauss’ understanding of political philosophy. In any event, this fusion represented by Schopenhauerian man closely parallels the fusion Nietzsche will advocate at the conclusion of the meditation on history.

at least up to the end of the eighteenth century” (2). Presently, however, this view is challenged by historicism, which is here defined as “the assertion that the fundamental distinction between philosophic and historical questions cannot in the last analysis be maintained” (2). Fully understood, this view may challenge the very possibility of philosophy, but at the very least it calls into question the traditional understanding of philosophy. In so doing, historicism appears to strike at the roots of philosophy, and in that sense to be more genuinely philosophic than all previous philosophy. In the light, or darkness, of historicism, the questions of the nature of political things and the best or just political order do not appear amenable to being answered ‘once and for all’. Strauss describes the situation now facing political philosophy as altogether unprecedented and identifies historicism as the most urgent question confronting political philosophy today.¹⁶

Strauss next introduces what will emerge as a pivotal concept in his essay: the fusion of philosophy and history. He warns that the feasibility of such a fusion “may well be doubted”, but that some version of this fusion “appears to be, as it were, the natural goal” of “nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought” (3). He adds that historicism, unlike positivism or existentialism, e.g., is not merely one among many schools of thought,¹⁷ but a “powerful agent that affects more or less all present day thought” (3). Historicism is, so far as we can speak of such a thing, “the spirit of our time”.

Strauss emphasizes that contemporary man’s focus on history is unprecedented.

Doubtless, we are meant to note the historical character of this claim, which perhaps

¹⁶ That is, contrary to the claims of many readers of Strauss, the most urgent question facing political philosophy is not the theological-political question, or the question of the gods, but the question of the possibility of philosophy in the face of historicism. Consider in this connection the exclusivity of his assertion in ‘What is Political Philosophy?’, “It is only at this point that we come face to face with the serious antagonist to political philosophy: historicism” (p26).

¹⁷ *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p27.

exemplifies history in the service of philosophy. Strauss observes that in numerous specialized disciplines, many of which overlap, historical studies are pursued by myriads of students with unprecedented attention to detail. These studies are considered intrinsically valuable, and it is believed that “historical knowledge forms an integral part of the highest kind of learning” (4). In order to get “the proper perspective” on this phenomenon, we are invited to consider that Plato’s educational curriculum in the *Republic* does not include history (Strauss focuses on the pre-philosophic or pre-dialectical curriculum of Book VII), and that Aristotle, himself an “outstanding” historian, considered poetry more philosophic than history. Strauss informs his readers -- again, presumably on the basis of historical studies -- that this “unhistorical” attitude characterizes all classical and medieval philosophers. Heretofore, it was the rhetoricians, it seems, and not the philosophers who praised history.¹⁸ The history of philosophy was left to “antiquarians”.¹⁹

This entire set of observations with which Strauss begins his ‘Political Philosophy and History’ is taken directly from Nietzsche’s *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, most from its fourth section. Nietzsche, just as Strauss does, turns from a discussion of the “three respects” in which “history pertains to the living man” (67/II.1), the three forms of history man needs, to consider the present age and its use of history. “And now let us quickly take a look at our own time!” (77/IV.2). He finds, just as Strauss found in his ‘quick look’ at his own time, a preoccupation with history which “has never before been seen by any generation”

¹⁸ Strauss surely has Demosthenes in mind, in particular the observation Hobbes offers in his translation of Thucydides that Demosthenes copied that monumental work of history by hand three times. Later in his essay, Nietzsche will himself mention Demosthenes (113/IX.7).

¹⁹ Here Strauss is likely referring to Diogenes Laertius, for whom Nietzsche had a special fondness, and whose account of the Lives of the Philosophers was the subject of Nietzsche’s own dissertation, and was to be the model for his own book on the ancient philosophers which he never completed. Diogenes also appears in Nietzsche’s essay on history, notably identified an historian of philosophy -- thus an instance of the antiquarian mode of history (98/VII.3).

(78/IV.2). Later, at the outset of the ninth section, Nietzsche will ask, “Is our age perhaps such a first born? -- The vehemence of its historical sense is so great and is expressed in so universal and altogether unrestrained a manner, that future ages will in fact count it as a first born at any rate in this respect” (107/IX.1).

Not only is the currently prevalent historicism recognized by both Strauss and Nietzsche as unprecedented, but they both detect in it an urgency and danger. Whereas Strauss considers “the question that [historicism] raises is today the most urgent question for political philosophy” (2), Nietzsche remarks more generally that “the question to what degree life requires the service of history at all is one of the highest questions and concerns affecting the health of a man, a people, a culture” (67/I.12). Subsequently, in discussing the ascendancy of the historical sense, he warns that “It is indeed the hour of a great peril” (114/IX.7). He even raises the prospect that, as a result of the “vehemence of its historical sense” there may never again “be any *future ages* in the cultural sense” (107/IX.1).

Nietzsche and Strauss are further in accord in viewing the whole of contemporary culture as infused and enthused by an historical madness. Every discipline, every possible study, has become a source for historical ‘knowledge’:

Historical knowledge streams in unceasingly from inexhaustible wells, the strange and incoherent forces its way forward, memory opens all its gates and yet is not open wide enough, nature travails in an effort to receive, arrange and honour these strange guests, but they themselves are in conflict with one another and it seems necessary to constrain and control them if one is not oneself to perish in their conflict (78/IV.3).

Both Strauss and Nietzsche appeal to the Greeks in order to gain some perspective on the contemporary historical excesses. As alluded to before, Strauss observes:

We take it for granted that historical knowledge forms an integral part of the highest kind of learning. To see this fact in the proper perspective, we

need only look back to the past. When Plato sketched in his *Republic* a plan of studies... he did not even allude to history. We cannot recall too often the saying of Aristotle... that poetry was more philosophic than history (4).

Nietzsche's version runs:

Imagine, for example, a Greek observing such a culture: he would perceive that for modern man 'educated' and 'historically educated' seem so to belong together as to mean one and the same thing and to differ only verbally (79/IV.3).

In light of the above, Strauss' assigning the label "antiquarian" to the classical intellectual historian -- the very designation Nietzsche assigns to that form of history useful to man as he "preserves and reveres" -- appears as yet another subtle allusion to Nietzsche's essay.²⁰ We might add that Strauss is himself primarily recognized as an historical scholar of political philosophy who paid particular attention to the ancients. Nietzsche, we recall, began by asserting his own 'antiquarian' credentials:

it is only to the extent that I am a pupil of earlier times, especially the Hellenic, that though a child of the present time I was able to acquire such untimely experiences. That much, however, I must concede to myself on account of my profession as a classicist: for I do not know what meaning classical studies could have for our time if they were not untimely -- that is to say acting counter to our time, and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come (60/F.3).

IV Historicizing Historicism

Strauss uses his return to the ancients as the departure point for his historical account of historicism. On this account, the 'unhistorical' approach of the ancients

²⁰ An allusion which Strauss incorporates into others of his writings, consider the opening words of his *The City and Man*: "*It is not self-forgetting and pain-loving antiquarianism nor self-forgetting and intoxicating romanticism which induces us to turn with passionate interest, with unqualified willingness to learn, toward the political thought of classical antiquity. We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time, the crisis of the West*" (p1). Which is as much as to say, it is not for antiquarian or monumental uses of history that we turn to the Greeks, but for critical use. See also p8, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

underwent a “fundamental change” only in the sixteenth century.²¹ The architects of modernity, who presented a fundamental challenge to all earlier philosophy, and political philosophy in particular, placed a “novel emphasis on history” (5).²² Nevertheless, the “Age of Reason” was still permeated by an “unhistorical” impulse. From the seventeenth century onwards, however, the gap between history and philosophy closed with increasing rapidity. The notions of “the spirit of a time” and “philosophy of history” and the study of the history of philosophy as a philosophic discipline gained currency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This movement culminates in Hegel, whose teaching “was meant to be a ‘synthesis’ of philosophy and history” (5). The nineteenth century sees the emergence of “the historical school” which introduced historical studies into jurisprudence, political science and economic science,²³ all of which were hitherto “‘unhistorical’ or at least a-historical”²⁴ (5).

Early nineteenth century historicism, however, was successfully attacked, only to be replaced by a more “advanced” or “sophisticated” historicism. As carried into the twentieth century, historicism now typically demands that each generation “reinterpret the past on the basis of its own experience and with a view to its own future.” Strauss further observes that such studies are not “contemplative, but activistic”, and from them

²¹ Strauss would no doubt grant that the rejection of classical thought was the work of seventeenth century thinkers as well: “The tradition that originated in classical Greece was rejected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in favor of a new political philosophy” (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p79). His general chronology places Machiavelli at the pivot point of the transformation, with subsequent thinkers such as Bacon, Hobbes and Descartes, contributing to Machiavelli’s effort.

²² The reliance on history on the part of these early moderns, is evidenced in the Baconian model. *The New Organon* concludes with a chapter “On Natural and Experimental History” and a list of 130 historical inquiries which are to be undertaken and from which useful and illuminating knowledge of nature’s mysterious workings are to be derived. These ‘histories’, however, are rather inquiries, and bear scant resemblance to what we designate by “history”. In specifying the sixteenth century, Strauss may have Machiavelli in mind, whose writings are permeated by historical examples, and a serious consideration of political history (*Discourses on Livy, Florentine Histories*). Thirdly, later in the essay Strauss explains that the early moderns partly modified and partly presupposed the fundamental concepts of ancient thought. As a result, the moderns cannot be understood except by means of history.

²³ Cf. *Natural Right and History*, p316.

²⁴ This is Strauss’ first use of the word “unhistorical” in Strauss’ essay, and he places it in quotation marks.

“ultimate guidance” in political matters is sought. The results of such studies are “visible in every curriculum and textbook of our time”. Whereas Plato’s curriculum “did not even allude to history”, ours are permeated by a preoccupation with historical questions. Or, as Nietzsche puts it:

Examine with this in mind the literature of our higher school and educational system over the past decades: one will see with angry astonishment that, all the varying proposals and vehement contentions notwithstanding, the actual objective of education is everywhere thought of as being the same; the outcome of education hitherto, the production of the ‘educated man’ as he is presently understood... (118/X.3).

Strauss observes that we have ceased asking what the natures of political things are, or what the best or just political order is, and ask only what the “probable or desirable future” has in store. “Philosophic questions have been transformed into... historical questions of a ‘futuristic’ character” (6).

Paragraphs two through six of his essay show Strauss historicizing historicism. That is, he presents an account of historicism as itself emerging historically. He outlines the transformations it has undergone, and, in subsequent paragraphs, points out many of the curious and questionable conclusions it draws and assumptions upon which it rests. Against the background of this distinctly modern move towards history, Strauss hearkens back to the classical understanding of political philosophy which was profoundly “unhistorical”, noting that the early moderns were also “absorbed by the ‘unhistorical’ teachings of the Age of Reason” (5).

In spite of a certain appearance to the contrary, Nietzsche too locates “a fundamental change” in the relationship between life and history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the final analysis, he also identifies modern science as at the root of our ‘historicism’, but does so only indirectly. But, in the eighth section of his

essay, Nietzsche seems instead to trace the contemporary “excess of history” to the “medieval *memento mori*” and ultimately Christianity.²⁵ However, as we have already noted, this account is offered “only with some hesitation”, and is accompanied by a challenge to “replace this explanation... with a better one” (102/VIII.2).

Earlier in the essay, he had explicitly indicated that it is science, the “gleaming and glorious star” of science, which is behind our “passionate turn to history”. Having recognized, (with the help of the Greeks) how anomalous our age is, Nietzsche begins the fourth section asking, “where has all the clarity, all the naturalness and purity of this relationship between life and history gone?... Does the fault lie with us who observe it? Or has the constellation of life and history really altered through the interposing of a mighty, hostile star between them?” (77/IV.2). In contrast to the hesitation which accompanies his later account, Nietzsche is here unqualified and unhesitating in his declarations about the relationship between history and science. Indeed his very use of the images of “stars” and “constellation”, apparently alluding to the Copernican revolution, provide us a fairly precise notion of when Nietzsche locates this transformation.

In order to remove any doubt as to the primacy Nietzsche places on the science as the source for the contemporary historical excesses, we can turn to the concluding section of his essay. Nietzsche begins the section crying out: “Land! Land! Enough and more than enough of the wild and erring voyage over strange dark seas! At last a coast appears in sight: we must land on it whatever it may be like, and the worst of harbours is better

²⁵ Nor would Nietzsche be alone in so doing. See Karl Lowith’s *Meaning in History*. Strauss himself attributes such an interpretation to Hegel and the early historicists, or the position which Nietzsche confronted: “[T]he absolute religion, Christianity, had become completely reconciled with the world; it had become completely secularized” (*Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p24-5). Similarly, in ‘The Three Waves of Modernity’, Strauss casts Nietzsche against Hegelian historicism, attributing to Hegel the view that “the essence of modernity is secularized Christianity, for secularization is Hegel’s conscious and explicit intention” (*Political Philosophy*, p95). Cf. *Natural Right and History*, p316-7.

than to go reeling back into a hopeless infinity of scepticism” (116/X.1). Nietzsche describes the voyage as having been “perilous and exciting”. He notes, “How far we still are from the quiet contemplativeness with which we first watched our ship put out.”

For anyone familiar with this same image in Bacon’s *Great Instauration*, Nietzsche’s meaning here is unmistakable.²⁶ The extent of Nietzsche’s dialogue with Bacon is simply too far-ranging for adequate treatment here. Suffice it to note that many of Nietzsche’s most memorable images in his essay on history bear the marks of their Baconian heritage. Here in particular, Nietzsche’s cry for land, is a response to the voyage of discovery Bacon announces in the *Great Instauration*. In opposition to the contemplative (and as such, inactive and unuseful) science of Aristotle and the medievals, Bacon held forth the vision of an unprecedented voyage of discovery. Likening himself to Columbus in his discovery of the new world, Bacon encouraged a setting forth from the safe and quiet harbors of contemplation onto the strange and dark seas. The first part of this monumental project, “The Divisions of the Sciences”, consists of a survey of the present state of the arts and sciences, which Bacon likens to a coasting voyage made in preparation “for passing beyond” this familiar world to the ‘undiscovered country’. This voyage was intended to be, or at least was advertised as, a passage to a new kind of world, as envisioned in *The New Atlantis*. After three centuries, however, Nietzsche has had enough, for the trans-Atlantic passage has turned out to be a perpetual voyage, with no conceivable end in sight.

All this is by way of indicating that for both Strauss and Nietzsche, the “fundamental change” which is ultimately accountable for the contemporary excesses of history, was the work of men such as Bacon, and the sixteenth and seventeenth century

²⁶ The image, however, does not originate with Bacon, but almost surely derives from Machiavelli, perhaps the architect of the “fundamental change” of the sixteenth century (see *Discourses on Livy*, Epistle Dedicatory, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p40). Nonetheless, on the basis of other images in Nietzsche’s essay, we suspect that it is Bacon that Nietzsche has in mind.

architects of modernity generally.²⁷

V Socrates vs. Historicism

In paragraphs seven and eight, Strauss subjects historicism, in its manifold forms, to a Socratic investigation according to the principles of classical dialectics: division and collection.²⁸ Strauss first identifies from among the “most varied guises” and “most different levels” three “forms” of historicism (7). The most common form demands that we replace ‘timeless’ questions about natures with contemporary questions about contemporary things. Strauss reminds us that we cannot identify something as an instance without some general understanding of what kind of thing it is an instance of. When Socrates asks “What is X?” he cannot be answered by a catalog of instances of an X, for that presupposes an answer to the very question he is asking. If, as we suppose, Strauss is ‘playing Socrates’, then we would do well to pay careful attention to his examples. As Strauss notifies his readers later in the essay, “We have illustrated the difference between our political ideas and earlier political ideas by the examples of the ideas of the state and of the city. The choice of these examples was not accidental” (33). Strauss’s examples of the questions which this “most common form of historicism” seeks to replace are “the nature of political things”, “of the state”, and “of the nature of man”. At the outset of his essay, however, he had identified the informing questions of non-historical political philosophy as “the nature of political things” and “the best, or just, political order” (1). This “most common” historicism does not even acknowledge the

²⁷ We cannot help but add, that if one returns to *The Great Instauration* with Nietzsche’s essay in mind, one will find that Bacon is quite clear that, contrary to Nietzsche’s rhetoric, his project is also to be undertaken “for the benefit and use of life” a phrase strikingly similar to the title of Nietzsche’s own essay. Which is to say for all Bacon’s rhetoric to the contrary (including his own uses of history), his endeavor is equally based upon unhistorical foundations, just as Strauss had conceded.

²⁸ Just as Nietzsche does near the outset of his essay on history, Strauss employs “an ancient, tried-and-tested procedure” (66/1.9).

question of “best, or the just, political order”, presumably because it considers the matter settled by “the state”. Secondly, this “most common” historicism does not include “the nature of man” (7) among the set of “political things”. The notion of “the state” is founded upon and comes into being on the premise that man is not political by nature. As well we should notice that on the view that common historicism seeks to replace, Strauss attributes a “nature” both to man and political things, but not to the state. The modern state is conceived of as profoundly artificial. Later Strauss will indicate that the historical emergence of historicism is closely bound up with the replacement of the city by the modern state.

To repeat, “the most common form of historicism” demands that “questions of the nature of political things, of the state, of the nature of man, and so forth, be replaced by the questions of the modern state, of modern government, of the present political situation, of modern man, of our society, our culture, our civilization, and so forth” (7). In the first paragraph Strauss had identified questions regarding “individual ‘civilizations’” as historical and not philosophic. Later, in the sixteenth paragraph, Strauss informs us that “every political situation contains elements which are essential to all political situations”. In the twelfth paragraph Strauss notes that the distinction between State and Society was not always univocally acknowledged. In sum, through these various lists of questions and his choice of examples in the essay, Strauss is pointing his readers to specific differences between historicist and pre-historicist thinking with respect to the subject matter and approach to political philosophy. These differences will hold the key to unlocking Strauss’ account of the emergence of historicism, and its continuing plausibility, as well as pointing to what must be accommodated if not overcome in order to return to a pre-historicist, or “unhistorical”

political philosophy.

Strauss assures his readers that “more thoughtful” historicists grant the primacy of universal questions, but deny that any answer, clarification, or even discussion of these questions can be anything but “historically conditioned” (7). This second form of historicism, then, places a great deal of importance in “the specific situation” in which an answer is suggested. On this view, in short, the questions may be permanent or universal, but the answers cannot be.²⁹

The third form of historicism which Strauss identifies is described as going “to the end of the road”, and declaring philosophy itself and its universal questions an historically contingent outcome of a “specific ‘historic’ type”: namely, Western man or the intellectual heirs of the Greeks.

Upon dividing the manifold varieties of historicism into three main “forms”, Strauss now proceeds to elucidate what it is that allows us to recognize each as an instance of “historicism”. He identifies two assumptions characteristic of all forms of historicism. The first is that there is a fundamental distinction between a “field” called “Nature” and a “field” called “History” (8). Strauss identifies this assumption as distinguishing “historicism most clearly from the pre-historicist view”.³⁰ On the earlier view “‘History’ as an object of knowledge did not exist”. Strauss emphasizes this

²⁹ Furthermore, as Strauss regularly reminds his readers, the permanence of philosophic questions is enough to justify the philosophic endeavor: “In particular the ‘experience of history’ does not make doubtful the view that the fundamental problems, such as the problem of justice, persist and retain their identity in all historical change, however much they may be obscured by the temporary denial of their relevance and however variable or provisional all human solutions to these problems may be. In grasping these problems as problems, the human mind liberates itself from its historical limitations. No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in its original, Socratic sense” (*Natural Right and History*, p32). Similar considerations seem to apply to the study of the history of philosophy; see *What is Political Philosophy?*, p229-9.

³⁰ “The adherents of the modern historical view... reject as mythical the premise that nature is the norm, they reject the premise that nature is of higher dignity than any of the works of man. On the contrary, either they conceive of man and his works, his varying notions of justice included, as equally natural as all other real things, or else they assert a basic dualism between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom or history” (*Natural Right and History*, p11).

distinction by asking his readers to “wonder what the Bible or Plato, e.g., would have called that X which we are in the habit of calling ‘History’” (8). Again it is suggested that we can get perspective on our own historicism through comparison with the Greeks (in particular, Plato). Strauss, it would seem, feels similarly to Nietzsche with respect to his own education with the Greeks: “it is only to the extent that I am a pupil of earlier times that, though a child of the present time I was able to acquire such untimely experiences” (60/F.3). In this instance, however, Strauss also asks his readers to consider what the Bible would have called what we call ‘History’. The Bible has no word for ‘History’. That would seem to make deriving modern historicism from the Bible devilishly difficult. For that matter, we may wonder about the other ‘field’ which historicism identifies: ‘Nature’. For while Plato may be stumped by capital ‘H’ History, the Bible (Strauss himself sometimes reminds us) has no word for *either* ‘Nature’ or ‘History’.³¹

The second assumption characteristic of historicism is that earlier teachings cannot be restored at a later time without essential modification. This view, we learn, is “a necessary consequence of” the view that teachings are essentially related to their times, or the situation in which they were expounded.

VI Untimely Considerations

The ninth paragraph of Strauss’ essay is the shortest. Strauss here identifies what would be required for an “adequate discussion of historicism”. Such a discussion “would be identical with a critical analysis of modern philosophy in general”. Strauss “cannot dare to try to do more than indicate some considerations which should prevent one from taking historicism for granted” (9). Notice the careful, not to say excessive, disavowal of any larger undertaking. Strauss “cannot dare” -- even “to try” -- merely to “indicate” --

³¹ *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p245, 253.

“some considerations” -- such as would only prevent one “from taking historicism for granted.” Given his depreciation of what this extraordinarily rich essay is intended to accomplish, Strauss must have the highest regard for “an adequate discussion of historicism”, or “a critical analysis of modern philosophy in general”. We may note in passing that Nietzsche describes his *Beyond Good and Evil*, a work of nine parts,³² as “in all essentials a *critique of modernity*”.³³

Strauss, however, is merely offering “some considerations”. Here we should note that ‘Considerations’ is an alternative rendering of the German word *Betrachtungen*, which has become standardly translated as ‘meditations’ (as in *Untimely Meditations*). Strauss’ students Werner Dannhauser and Catherine Zuckert have apparently suggested using ‘Untimely Considerations’ as an alternative translation of *Unzeitgemäss Betrachtungen*.³⁴

This brief ninth paragraph is followed by a ‘second beginning’ to the essay. Strauss now takes up the task of indicating the aforementioned ‘considerations’. The first of these is a “popular misunderstanding”. Strauss traces the source of this view to the “historical school” which held that “certain influential philosophers of the eighteenth century” believed that the rational political order should be implemented “at anytime and in any place, without any regard to the particular conditions of time and place” (10). Whatever may be so about these ‘Enlightenment’ philosophers, Strauss insists that this simplified Burkean³⁵ view is historically false with respect to ‘non-historical’ philosophers generally. Past political philosophers “in spite or rather because of the non-historical character of their thought” (10) drew precisely the distinction Strauss had

³² Strauss refers to this essay in *Natural Right and History* in the ninth note of the first chapter. *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* also has nine numbered sections.

³³ *Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I Write Such Good Books’, ‘Beyond Good and Evil’, section 2.

³⁴ Cambridge University Press edition of *Untimely Meditations*, Brezeale ed., *Note on the Text*, pxlv.

³⁵ Compare *Natural Right and History*, p295-6, p12-13.

drawn in the opening paragraph of his essay between the philosophic question of the “best political order” simply, and the “practical” or “historical” question of whether a given time and place is suitable to that “best political order”. They “naturally knew” and “took it for granted” that “political action” presupposes a consideration of particularities of time and place. Strauss concludes, on the basis of this use of history, that this criticism is “wholly irrelevant to the question raised by historicism” (10).

Strauss turns now to a second consideration which is also held by “a large number” (11). This view holds that “‘history’ itself seems to have decided in favor of historicism”: that historicism is superior because it emerges later in time. Strauss questions the legitimacy of “worship[ing] ‘success’ as such.” Here the echo of Nietzsche is unmistakable: Nietzsche describes the Hegelian view as culminating in “a naked admiration for success” which “leads to an idolatry of the factual” (105/VIII.5). Nietzsche continues, “If every success is a rational necessity, if every event is a victory of the logical or the ‘idea’ -- then down on your knees and do reverence to the whole stepladder of ‘success’!”. Strauss continues, observing that, “even if we grant that the truth will prevail in the end, we cannot be certain that the end has already come” (11). Nietzsche too mocks the notion of an “end of history”. As he puts it, “I am quite willing to vote with the majority... that next Saturday night punctually at twelve o’clock the world shall perish; and our decree shall conclude: from tomorrow there shall be no more time and the newspapers shall appear no more. But perhaps our decree will have no effect” (112/IX.7). And yet, like Strauss, he may be willing to “grant that the truth will prevail in the end”: consider his remark in the tenth section, “leaving these doubters to time, which brings all things to light...” (122/X.12).

Strauss’ second critique of this ‘Hegelian’ view -- that the “anarchy of systems”

refutes non-historical political philosophy -- reiterates, as he had observed at the outset, that historical questions merely raise the philosophic question, but cannot answer it.³⁶ When confronted with alternative accounts of political fundamentals, we are obliged to ask which is true. Here Strauss illustrates his point with an historical example of his own. “[S]ome political philosophers have distinguished between State and Society, whereas others explicitly or implicitly reject that distinction” (12). This discrepancy invites us to consider who is correct. Strauss adds that, even if one could establish that we have not hitherto answered the philosophic questions about political fundamentals, this would only indicate our ignorance, not the insolubility of the questions. The “anarchy of systems” we become aware of through the study of the history of philosophy merely impels us to philosophize. Furthermore, Strauss notes, it is not as though historicism has put an end to variety and controversy -- as he tacitly indicated through his earlier dividing and collecting of the manifold forms of historicism.

Strauss has implicitly linked Hegel to this view through the example of the distinction between State and Society, but has cleverly used that distinction, and the “disgraceful variety” of philosophic responses to it, to illustrate that such a controversy could not possibly be settled historically. Rather, such a controversy could only be settled philosophically, through asking which of the opposing views is correct. Furthermore, even if history could teach that all previous political philosophy had failed, this would not indicate anything more than that we remain ignorant and ought to strive to replace such ignorance with knowledge.

A third consideration which, if unchecked, leads to our “taking historicism for granted” is that “a close relation exists between each political philosophy and the

³⁶ “One cannot understand the meaning of the attack on natural right in the name of history before one has realized the utter irrelevance of this argument.... Above all, knowledge of the indefinitely large variety of notions of right and wrong is so far from being incompatible with the idea of natural right that it is the essential condition of the emergence of that idea” (*Natural Right and History*, p9-10).

historical situation in which it emerged” (13). This, we recall, is the basis of the second assumption characteristic of all forms of historicism. And Strauss grants that this “fact” “can be established by historical studies” (13). Historicists hold that the variety displayed in the history of philosophy is “a function of the variety of historical situations”. Strauss illustrates this view with the examples of Plato and Locke. Plato’s political philosophy, it is argued, is “essentially related” to the Greek polis just as Locke’s political philosophy is to “the English revolution of 1688.” Historicists conclude from this observation that “no political philosophy can reasonably claim to be valid beyond the historical situation to which it is essentially related” (13).

Prior to examining Strauss’ critique of this view, we ought perhaps to pause and notice that here Strauss has -- for the first time explicitly -- juxtaposed a philosopher who reasons about the city with one who focuses on the state. In the previous paragraph, Strauss had mentioned political philosophers who distinguish between State and Society, and while Hegel is the chief target of that critique, the distinction itself is most plausibly traced to Locke’s *Second Treatise*. Irrespective of whether the distinction is in Locke, however, the state is clearly Locke’s answer to the question of “the best political order”, just as Plato’s seems to be *kallipolis*. Strauss is effectively connecting Hegel, the architect of contemporary historicism, the “outstanding” philosopher who attempted a synthesis of philosophy and history, with Locke, the architect of the modern state and the first to distinguish between State and Society. Strauss will later imply that the seeds of historicism are sown in the transition from the city to the state, and that the distinction between city and state is traceable to the distinction between ancient and modern science. Strauss has here made his first move in that direction. Hegel is linked to Locke through the idea of the State, and both are opposed to Plato and the polis.

In any event, Strauss again uses history to criticize the historicist claim. Here he even draws our attention to the fact that he has been doing so. “[T]he historical evidence invoked in favor of historicism has a much more limited bearing than seems to be assumed” (14). Historicists, Strauss now tells us, are “superficial readers” who have not recognized that political philosophers adapted their mode of expression “to the prejudices of their contemporaries” (14).

Revisiting an earlier point, Strauss notes that past political philosophers, recognizing the discrepancy between what would be best simply and what is best under a particular set of historical circumstances, combined a “philosophic” teaching with a “civil” teaching. Strauss here footnotes Locke in support of this very distinction. He thus implies that the claim that “Locke’s political philosophy is essentially related to the English revolution of 1688” is an instance of just such superficial reading. Secondly we note that Locke is among the philosophers who have been mistakenly held accountable for 1789 and the tyranny of “abstract principles” by “the representatives of the ‘historical school’” whom Strauss alludes to in the tenth paragraph.³⁷ The citations, however, clearly indicate Locke’s own awareness of the potential historical and temporal limitations on word usage as well as a recognition that caution, even deliberate obscurity, may be used in writing.³⁸ In any event, by here citing Locke as an instance of a writer read superficially by those who hold that “no political philosophy can reasonably claim to be valid beyond the historical situation to which it is essentially related” (13), Strauss undermines the straightforward appeal of such a view which inclines one to take

³⁷ Though Rousseau would seem to be the chief target, given that Strauss identifies these ‘culprits’ as being “influential philosophers of the eighteenth century” (10).

³⁸ Strauss, we note, cites both Locke’s *Of Civil Government* as well as his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. That is, both a ‘political’ work as well as a ‘philosophic’ or epistemological work. The obvious implication being that this “deliberate adaptation” is not something pertaining solely to political writing, but to writing generally. Strauss, however, may be pointing still further towards the foundation of Locke’s politics in his empiricism (or vice versa). This matter will resurface later in the essay with the mention of Hume.

"historicism for granted" (9).

To this 'historical' critique, Strauss introduces another consideration militating against the view that a connection between a philosophic teaching and its historical situation implies "historical conditioning". Strauss point out the "obvious possibility... that the situation to which one particular doctrine is related, is particularly favorable to the discovery of *the truth*" (15). Strauss proceeds to illustrate this kind of 'genetic fallacy' with an example from the "natural law" tradition. From this example he concludes that any discovery of a relation between a philosophic doctrine and its time requires an interpretation, which in turn "presupposes the philosophic study of the doctrine in itself with a view to its truth or falsehood" (15). For presumably a doctrine's being true is itself an adequate explanation for its being espoused. Only once one has conclusively established that a doctrine is not true is one licensed to search for an historical explanation for its being believed.

VII The Old-fashioned and the Obsolete

After presenting these first three considerations which should prevent us from taking historicism for granted, Strauss pauses to reflect -- amusedly -- upon how such an argument must seem to the "old-fashioned", to those "not familiar with the ravages wrought by historicism". They would perhaps ridicule Strauss (or "us") for such a painful explanation of the obvious truism that we cannot reject a doctrine without considering the possibility that it is simply true.

Nietzsche, we note, also gives voice to "old-fashioned" objections in the context of his own critique of the Hegelian view of history. There Nietzsche exclaims, "How obsolete and old-fashioned my objections to this complex of mythology and virtue are!"

(105/VIII.6). We thus suspect that Strauss' imagined “old-fashioned” fellow interlocutor is Nietzsche. Of course, in addition to voicing old-fashioned objections, Nietzsche is explicit about having been literally “old-fashioned” -- he is pupil of the Greeks. But is Nietzsche “not familiar with the ravages wrought by historicism”? Elsewhere Strauss seems to indicate that Nietzsche’s critique of the “decayed Hegelianism” of his time only led to a more radical, and pernicious form of historicism.³⁹ It is in this sense that Nietzsche could be said to be unfamiliar with contemporary historicism.

In spite of how pedantic such observations may seem to thoughtful individuals of earlier times, or those pupils of earlier times, Strauss explains that “in the circumstances we are compelled to state explicitly that prior to careful investigation we cannot exclude the possibility that a political philosophy which emerged many centuries ago is *the* true political philosophy” (16). Notice that Strauss is here illustrating his earlier point regarding the tailoring of one’s teaching to the prejudices of one’s contemporaries. That is, Strauss himself may be combining his exposition of what he considers to be the political truth, with “an exposition of what [he] consider[s] desirable or feasible in the circumstances, or intelligible on the basis of the generally received opinions” (14). In these circumstances, Strauss must make certain things painfully explicit, which in earlier times would be taken for granted. On the other hand, he may also moderate his language and aspirations in light of what is possible. That does not mean that he is historically limited. Quite to the contrary: such an effort could serve a profoundly untimely intention.⁴⁰ Strauss rephrases his earlier point: “[A] political philosophy does not become obsolete merely because the historical situation, in particular the political situation to which it was related has ceased to exist” (16).

³⁹ *Natural Right and History*, p26, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p55.

⁴⁰ Strauss’ circumstances, we should add, may also not be altogether favorable to an open declaration of his allegiance to Nietzsche. See Conclusion.

Let us take this opportunity to point out a further subtle but indicative connection between the Strauss and Nietzsche essays on history. Following his use of ‘old-fashioned’, Strauss uses the word ‘obsolete’ three times in two paragraphs. It appears shortly after his use of ‘old-fashioned’ in the sixteenth paragraph and twice in the seventeenth paragraph. Nietzsche plays upon the notion of obsolescence throughout his essay, and (as we saw), linked his seeming “old-fashioned” to his seeming “obsolete”. If we are correct in implying that Nietzsche uses ‘old-fashioned’ literally -- in reference to his own classical education -- then it does not seem implausible that Strauss and Nietzsche both similarly use ‘obsolete’ to characterize the classical world according to the reigning historicist view. Furthermore, presuming Nietzsche may also be using ‘obsolete’ literally, we should note that it refers to the stamping on a coin being worn away. With this in mind, we may notice Nietzsche’s implicit comparison between the state-sponsored scholar of the modern world and previous incarnations of the “man of learning”, including, presumably, past political philosophy:

Actually our most recent men of learning are wise on one point, and on that they are, I admit, wiser than anyone has ever been, but on all other points they are infinitely different -- to use a cautious expression -- from any man of learning of the old stamp. This notwithstanding, they demand honours and advantages for themselves, as though the state and public opinion were duty bound to accept the new coins as being of equal value to the old. The carters have made a contract with one another and by restamping themselves as geniuses have decreed that genius is superfluous (99/VII.3).

VIII The Most Important Example

To illustrate this point, Strauss chooses “the most important example” (17). Here we revisit the Locke and Plato controversy, the State and Society distinction, and the

earlier examples distinguishing philosophic and historical questions. According to Strauss, the emergence of the modern state does not make classical political philosophy obsolete. Strauss, again relying on history in his attack on historicism, stresses that while most classical political philosophers preferred the city to the other political forms they were aware of, this preference was not simply a manifestation of their historical situation. They were aware of alternatives (tribal associations and the Eastern monarchy) and they “realized, at least as clearly as we realize it today, that the city is essentially superior” (17) to those alternatives. Which is to say, Strauss ‘clearly realizes’ that the city is superior to the Eastern monarchy and the tribe. The tribe, we learn is free but uncivilized and the Eastern monarchy is civilized but unfree. By civilization, Strauss understands “high development of the arts and sciences”. By freedom he understands “public spirit”. We may note in passing that Strauss’ reference to these standards might seem at odds with his indication that the informing questions of political philosophy include “the best, or just political order”. Why does Strauss not include justice here as a standard in light of which to evaluate various regimes? Or does he mean to suggest that the best or just political order is that which combines freedom and civilization as in the Greek city? Secondly, we note that Strauss’ definition of freedom as “public spiritedness” is curious and neither currently prevalent, nor intuitively clear. Strauss now argues that while the classics preferred the city on the basis of these standards, this was not a conclusion peculiar to their historical situation. For “up to and including the eighteenth century, some of the most outstanding political philosophers quite justifiably preferred the city to the modern state which had emerged since the sixteenth century, precisely because they measured the modern state of their time by the standards of freedom and civilization.”

Doubtless he has Rousseau in mind, whoever else.⁴¹ Strauss continues: “Only in the nineteenth century does classical political philosophy in a sense become obsolete” (17).

Before proceeding further it is worth pausing to note the conspicuous parallels between Strauss’ historical account of the emergence of historicism, and his historical account of the emergence of the modern state. Both feature a fundamental shift occurring in the sixteenth century. The modern state is said to have emerged from “the sixteenth century”, just as a “fundamental change” in the relationship between philosophy and history “began to make itself felt only in the sixteenth century”(5). Furthermore, Strauss pinpoints the nineteenth century as the turning point where non-historicist political philosophy is replaced by historicist political philosophy (5-6)⁴² classical political philosophy becoming “in a sense... obsolete” (17) with the ascendency of the modern state as the only viable political form. Strauss will later make this parallelism explicit and reiterate the importance of this particular example.

As an explanation of what is meant by classical political philosophy becoming “obsolete”, Strauss compares the “state of the nineteenth century” to the “Macedonian and Roman empires”, the “feudal monarchy”, and “the absolute monarchy of the modern period”. In contrast to these regimes, the modern state could claim to meet the standards of freedom and civilization as fully as did the city. However, even with the ascendancy of the modern state classical political philosophy does not become unqualifiedly obsolete, for it was classical political philosophy that “expounded in a ‘classic’ manner the standards of freedom and civilization” (17).

These points having been made, Strauss observes that modern democracy either “elicited” or was “the outcome of” a “reinterpretation” of the standards of “freedom” and

⁴¹ “Rousseau attacked modernity in the name of two classical ideas: the city and virtue, on the one hand, and nature, on the other” (*Natural Right and History*, p253).

⁴² *Natural Right and History*, p12.

“civilization” (17). Furthermore, he adds, there may be grounds for considering this reinterpretation superior to the original understanding. Moreover, this reinterpretation “could not have been foreseen by classical political philosophy” (17).⁴³

We have seen that Strauss has, through carefully chosen examples, illustrated a two stage transformation in both the relationship between philosophy and history, and in the movement from city to State through the movement from Plato to Locke and from Locke to Hegel. Plato and Locke agree on the existence of trans-historical or “unhistorical” political truths, whereas with Hegel this all changes. Locke, however, was one of the foremost architects of the modern State, and very much a proponent of modern science. Earlier we heard that the view that history is not an integral part of political philosophy (1), “was unquestionably predominant at least up to the end of the eighteenth century” (2). Hegel’s teaching is described as a “‘synthesis’ of philosophy and history” (5). By thus locating two key turning points in the history of political philosophy one pertaining to philosophy’s relationship to history, and the other tracking the advent of the modern state, Strauss will have made possible a critique of historicism which does not necessitate the monumental task of a “critical analysis of modern philosophy in general” (9).⁴⁴

Strauss has also worked into this long paragraph a conspicuous allusion to Nietzsche’s meditation on history. Nietzsche, immediately after announcing the task for one who would explain the modern excess of history, advocates that insofar as we regard

⁴³ “For the relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics” (*The City and Man*, p11). “This concept of ‘state’ is wholly alien to [Aristotle’s] thought. When we speak of ‘state’ today, we ordinarily understand state in contradistinction to society” (*The Crisis of Political Philosophy*, p95).

⁴⁴ But, Strauss warns, such an effort will be most challenging: “The genesis of historicism is inadequately understood. In the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to say at what point in the modern development the decisive break occurred with the ‘unhistorical’ approach that prevailed in all earlier philosophy” (*Natural Right and History*, p13). Notice that here too Strauss places the word ‘unhistorical’ in quotation marks.

ourselves as heirs or “*pupils of a declining antiquity*” (103/VIII.2), we use this self-understanding as “our honour and our spur” (103/VIII.3). In this way, we may first come see ourselves as having “developed the spirit of Alexandrian-Roman culture... nobly and fruitfully” (103/VIII.2). On Nietzsche’s view if we learn to incorporate history the way the Alexandrian and Roman empires did, we may ultimately “be permitted to set ourselves the even mightier task of striving to get behind and beyond this Alexandrian world and boldly seek our models in the original ancient Greek world of greatness, naturalness and humanity” (103/VIII.2). Earlier in the essay Nietzsche depicts how the imperial Romans accommodated the “flood of the foreign” and “cosmopolitan carnival of gods, arts and customs”, likening their approach to that of modern man (83/V.2). Later, in the concluding section of the essay, he describes the Greeks as “faced by a danger similar to that which faces us”. They emerged out of “a chaos of foreign... forms and ideas” and “a battle of all the gods of the East” by learning “*to organize the chaos*” (122/X.14). Through his juxtaposition of the Greek polis with the Alexandrian-Roman empires, Nietzsche is endeavoring to illustrate how we moderns may actualize, within the limits of the possible, a return to the city, and the relationship between history and life there evidenced.⁴⁵

This parallel between Strauss’ mention of the highly *civilized* “Macedonian and Roman empires” and Nietzsche’s reference to the cultural achievements of the same (though he employs the term ‘Alexandrian’ as an alternative to ‘Macedonian’), is apparently broken with Strauss’ placing equal emphasis on *freedom* as a criterion of

⁴⁵ That Nietzsche has something like this in mind is indicated at the outset of the essay through his appropriation of Cato’s *ceterum censeo*. For Cato spoke not to the Senate of the empire, but to the republic. The triumph of Scipio over the Carthaginians which Cato prophesies at the end of his life leads to the conflict between Scipio and Caesar, culminating in Rome’s becoming an empire. Nietzsche, we note, identifies the goal of the future the ascendancy of the “empire of youth” (116/IX.9). He then concludes his meditation, in the tenth section, with a parable regarding the Greeks’ solution to the problem of history -- “in antithesis to the Roman” (123/X.15).

judgment. For while the modern state may bear similarities to the civilization of the Alexandrian-Roman empires (their development of the arts and sciences), it surely surpasses those regimes in terms of freedom. But freedom, on the original understanding Strauss provides, is to be understood as “public spiritedness”. The understanding of freedom underpinning the modern state has little or nothing to do with “public spirit”. Indeed, Rousseau, that most prominent example of an eighteenth century philosopher who preferred the city to the modern state, favors the ancient city and criticizes the modern state precisely for not cultivating “public spirit” in the citizenry, and as being founded on an inadequate understanding of freedom. Whereas Rousseau and the ancients understood freedom to be political and personal self-rule, and as necessitating virtue, the understanding of freedom which underlies modern democracy is absence of restraint, or license. This observation may indicate that both Strauss and Nietzsche, agreeing with Rousseau, recognize the modern State as having jettisoned any concern with true freedom in the name of “high development of the arts and sciences” (17). That is, on both Strauss and Nietzsche’s views, the modern State is more akin to the “Macedonian and Roman empires” than the Greek polis. And on Strauss’ view, just as on Nietzsche’s, the way back to a restoration of the “greatness, naturalness, and humanity” (103/VIII.2) of the ancient Greeks is hindered by our historicism.

Nietzsche, however, has not overlooked the reinterpretation of freedom upon which the modern state is founded. To the contrary, he makes much of it:

In this new faith one is now setting to work with the clearest deliberation to erect the history of the future on the foundation of egoism: only it is to be a more prudent egoism than heretofore, an egoism which imposes certain restraints upon itself so as to ensure its endurance, an egoism which studies history precisely so as to become acquainted with that earlier imprudent egoism. (114/IX.7).

Thus, for both Strauss and Nietzsche, the modern state's claims to superiority are the outcome of a reinterpretation of freedom which jettisons "public spirit", and a reinterpretation of civilization which jettisons true "art" in favor of science and superficial adornment. This indicates that the modern state is in fact, perilously close to the Macedonian and Roman empires of antiquity, even to certain extent with respect to their approach to history. Through studying history, and recognizing this, we may come to recreate successfully the cultural achievements of those mighty epochs in the hopes that we may ultimately "be permitted to set ourselves the even mightier task of striving to get behind and beyond this Alexandrian world and boldly to seek our models in the original ancient Greek world of greatness, naturalness and humanity" (103/VIII.2).

IX Historicism and the Study of the History of Political Philosophy

Strauss concludes his critique of historicism's claim that all previous philosophic teachings are essentially related to their "times" by cautioning that any perceived relation between a teaching and its "time" must be preceded by an unprejudiced examination of that teaching "concerned exclusively with [its] truth or falsehood" (18). This demand has previously been raised by Strauss in paragraphs fifteen and sixteen, the same one in effect, as Strauss imagined would have sparked the ridicule of the "old-fashioned". Such an examination demands that the teaching first be understood as its originator understood it. As we have seen, this historical question is made all the more challenging by the two-fold character of the great philosophic writings. Part treatise proper, part tract for the times, philosophers of the past adapted their presentation to their contemporary audience for the sake of political efficacy, out of a concern for the health of their community, or as a safeguard against persecution.⁴⁶ This greatly complicates answering the biographical-

⁴⁶ Though there may be other or additional reasons.

historical question of what a given thinker actually thought to be true, for his writings must be interpreted with regard to this two-fold character -- sensitive, that is, to the fact that the truth can't always be safely or usefully expressed. And yet, only after the historical question of what a given thinker believed to be true has been determined can the philosophic question of its actual truth or falsity be raised.⁴⁷ Further still, this latter philosophic question is complicated by the possibility that a given time or political situation can be more or less favorable to the discovery of the truth. As Strauss earlier noted, "in understanding the genesis of a doctrine we are not necessarily driven to the conclusion that the doctrine in question cannot simply be true" (15).

We might now pause and notice that these observations must apply equally to Strauss' own treatment of historicism. That is, while thus far Strauss has provided an account of the historical emergence of historicism, its 'genesis', he is not "necessarily driven to the conclusion that the doctrine in question cannot be simply true." Strauss' historicizing of historicism is in itself insufficient, but must be accompanied by a philosophic critique of historicism's "truth or falsehood". This will be the burden of the second half of his essay. If this is the case, why has Strauss even bothered to provide this historical account? Is he merely being clever, ironically doing to historicism what historicism does to non-historicist thought? By his own admission, this cannot be regarded as a genuine critique of historicism, especially that variant of historicism which claims a basis in an "absolute moment" or privileged point in time.

In this connection, we might recall Strauss' earlier remark that "an adequate discussion of historicism would be identical with a critical analysis of modern philosophy in general" (9), and that such an analysis was beyond the scope of the present essay.

⁴⁷ In a particularly illuminating remark, cast (unusually) in the first person, Strauss tells us that upon confronting his observations regarding the great thinkers of the past, "we may begin to wonder whether the historical truth is not as difficult of access as the philosophic truth" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p232).

This forces Strauss's reader to acknowledge a provisional and incomplete character in his seemingly complete repudiation of historicism -- unless, that is, a philosophic critique of historicism is possible without completing "an adequate discussion of historicism" or "a critical analysis of modern philosophy in general". This may be possible were one to establish conclusively the pivotal turning point in the history of modern philosophy where historicism replaced early modern thinking, thereby allowing one to focus one's critique on that point. As we suggested earlier, Strauss has done this, and this, we argue, is the ultimate justification of Strauss' historical account of historicism. For while the genetic account may be rhetorically effective in undermining conviction in historicism it is not philosophically adequate. A philosophic critique which destroyed this pivotal view would thus undermine all subsequent historicist philosophy which based itself on it, and may even undercut views which emerged in conscious opposition to it. Furthermore, Strauss' location of this historical turning point will relieve him of the responsibility of comprehensively critiquing modern philosophy while nonetheless tracing the emergence of historicism from non-historicist modern philosophy and what considerations in non-historicist modern philosophy made this emergence plausible.

Ostensibly, however, Strauss' examination of the emergence of historicism out of the earlier belief in progress serves to shed light on the question of whether an "adequate understanding of the philosophy of the past is possible on the basis of historicism." Strauss warns his readers that "this presupposition is open to grave doubts" (18).

On Strauss' account, historicism came "to perceive, to elaborate, or at least to divine" the standards of historical exactness through its attack on the belief in progress. The belief in progress, we are now informed, is mid-way between the non-historical philosophic tradition, and historicism. It shares with non-historical philosophy an

affirmation of unhistorical standards of human excellence (in light of which change can be judged to be genuine improvement), but affirms a belief in a progressive “historical process”. However, Strauss will later remark that the belief in progress actually determines *all* modern thought.

In any event, Strauss seeks to distinguish the belief in progress from historicism on the basis of the former’s affirmation of “universally valid standards which do not require, or are not susceptible of, historical proof.” We have just been reminded, however, that historicism also endorses a set of universally valid standards: those of historical exactness.

And it is on the grounds of historical exactness that historicism criticized the belief in progress. Precisely because of its affirmation of historical progress, the progressive view necessarily misreads the past, since it presumes from the outset that the present is superior to the past. The progressive view leads to a sort of ‘Whig history’, examining the past with an eye to the past’s contribution to the present rather than the intention of the historical actor in question. Thus the belief in progress takes for granted that the present can understand the past better than it understood itself.

Strauss affirms that the “historical consciousness” was justified in protesting against the progressive view in the name of historical truth. Strauss takes up the argument of the “historical consciousness”, and his voice becomes indistinguishable at this point from that which protested against the belief in progress. “The task of the historian of thought is to understand the thinkers of the past exactly as they understood themselves, or to revitalize their thought according to their own interpretation” (21). According to Strauss and the “historical consciousness”, this is “the only practicable criterion of ‘objectivity’ in the history of thought.” The plurality of interpretations of a

given thinker which have emerged over the course of time do not warrant the conclusion that there is no *true* interpretation, they merely suggest that “new experience seems to shed new light on old texts”. In any event, the originator of a doctrine can be said to have understood the teaching in one way only, “provided he was not confused” (21).

Historicism, however, “is constitutionally unable to live up to the standards of historical exactness which it might be said to have discovered” (22). Just as the past suffered misinterpretation at the hands of the “belief in progress”, so it necessarily suffers at the hands of the historicist. Holding, as it necessarily does, that the historical approach is superior to a non-historical approach, historicism also implicitly affirms that it understands the past better than the past understood itself. The historicist in effect, denies that he can learn from the thinkers of the past; rather he must confine himself to learning about them. Nietzsche makes a similar observation in discussing contemporary culture, namely that it is not culture at all -- it is does not genuinely cultivate -- but is merely a kind of knowledge about culture. This would seem to be particularly the case in our approach to those highest manifestations of culture: past philosophers -- it is precisely the difference between learning *from* them, as opposed to merely learning *about* them. As Strauss notes, historicism simply repeats the very “sin” which legitimized its supplanting of the belief in progress. Thus, while the history of philosophy is central to the historicist’s approach, historicism “endangers by its very principle, if contrary to its intention, any adequate understanding of the philosophies of the past” (22).

Nietzsche too is concerned to elucidate “the only practicable criterion of ‘objectivity’ in the history of thought” (21). Nietzsche begins his discussion of ‘objectivity’ in history by pointing out how history is generally written. Just as Strauss does, Nietzsche objects to the practices of both progressive and historicist historians:

These naive historians call the assessment of the opinions and deeds of the past according to the everyday standards of the present moment ‘objectivity’: it is here they discover the canon of all truth; their task is to adapt the past to contemporary triviality (90/VI.3).

Nor is history to be understood as the utterly passive witnessing of events that “has no effect at all on his own subjectivity” (91/VI.4). This belief “that he to whom a moment of the past *means nothing at all* is the proper man to describe it” (93/VI.6) is “most infuriating... where the highest and rarest is to be represented”. As an example, Nietzsche chooses “the relationship between classicists and the Greeks they study”.

What, then (according to Nietzsche) is the proper approach to history? To begin with, it is distinctly Shakespearean. But essentially it amounts to the proposition, “Like to like!”. Nietzsche avers that only he who is capable of shaping the future will be capable of reading, understanding, and judging the past. Thus, in Strauss’ terms, only if one can rethink the thoughts of past philosophers as they thought them themselves, having penetrated their rhetoric and “seen through the book to imagine the living man”⁴⁸, can one be said to understand the past. As Nietzsche puts it:

If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present: only when you put forth your noblest qualities in all their strength will you divine what is worth knowing and preserving in the past.... Otherwise you will draw the past down to you. Do not believe historiography that does not spring from the head of the rarest minds” (94/VI.7).

Like the belief in progress, historicism cannot be based upon or emerge out of “an unbiased study of the history of philosophy” (23). For even if the historian comes to see a relation between a given historical or political situation and a given political philosophy, “he cannot thus rule out that the historical setting of one particular political philosophy is the ideal condition for the discovery of *the* political truth” (23). Historicism could thus

⁴⁸*Schopenhauer as Educator*, 136/II.8.

come to the conclusion that all politics and all thought are “essentially and radically ‘historical’” not through any historical study, but only through a comprehensive philosophic analysis of all “thought, knowledge, truth, philosophy, political things, political ideals”.⁴⁹ Such an analysis necessarily presents itself as the authentic interpretation of the history of political philosophy. Strauss observes that it is only after many centuries of non-historical political philosophy, with the resulting plurality of ‘philosophies’, that the possibility of political philosophy can be called into question. “The ultimate result of that reflection is historicism” (23).

Thus, just as Nietzsche does in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Strauss has come to see “something of which our time is rightly proud -- its cultivation of history -- as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it” (60/F.1). For Strauss acknowledges that “the ‘historical consciousness’ rightly protested in the interests of historical truth, of historical exactness” (21). The belief in progress, Strauss informs us, can be “legitimately criticized on purely historical grounds” (20). But, in thus cultivating and perfecting the study of history, historicism exposed itself to the very same criticism -- the justified criticism -- it leveled at the belief in progress. For Strauss, as for Nietzsche, the task thus becomes one of incorporating the important contribution made by the ‘historical consciousness’ into philosophic scholarship, but without accepting that the historical approach is itself a comprehensive advance over previous non-historical thought.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ As Strauss puts the matter in *Natural Right and History*, “If the rejection of natural right in the name of history is to have any significance, it must have a basis other than historical evidence. Its basis must be a philosophic critique of the possibility, or of the knowability, of natural right -- a critique somehow connected with ‘history’” (p10).

⁵⁰ All this having been said, Strauss is somewhat qualified in his praise of the insightfulness of the ‘historical consciousness’. We noted that Strauss may imply that historicism merely “divined” the standards of historical exactness. In addition it may be observed that Strauss states that it is only “according to common belief” that historicism discovered the standards of historical exactness (18).

X Historicism and Present Political Philosophy

Strauss turns now to consider what historicism means for political philosophy here and now. Whereas earlier Strauss offered a critique of commonplace historicism on the basis of its necessary reliance on the reality of non-historical, unchanging identities, or what he had called at the outset, “the nature of political things” (1), here he focuses on the other class of permanent questions in political philosophy: what he called at the outset, “the question of the best or just political order” (1). Historicism cannot replace these latter questions with a neutral analysis of present-day political practices any more than it could the former. “Nor can the question of the best political order be replaced by the question of the future order” (24). We simply cannot avoid raising the question of the desirability of the “probable future order”, and merely by raising this question we may affect its realization. Strauss’ example here is “a communist world society”, and he considers it a question as to whether such an outcome would be preferable to the “destruction of modern civilization”. This is precisely the view Strauss attributes to Nietzsche with respect to both the “universal and homogenous state” and Marx’s “universal classless and stateless society”.⁵¹ More importantly, however, any discussion of the desirability of the anticipated future order would imply “universal principles of preference”, or an answer to the question of the best political order (24). Historical questions, be they of past, present or future, are always necessarily subordinated to the unhistorical or perhaps suprahistorical questions.

Reminding us that he has yet to offer a critique of the philosophic analysis on which historicism rests, Strauss proceeds to examine what historicism could still maintain if such an analysis were correct. Here we revisit the second, more sophisticated form of

⁵¹ *What is Political Philosophy?*, p54-5, 129, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, p32, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p40.

historicism Strauss identified in the seventh paragraph. Historicism could still argue, Strauss tells us, that all answers to the universal questions -- which we cannot avoid asking -- are necessarily “historically conditioned”. In other words, in spite of the best (unhistorical) intentions of the best minds of the past, their attempts to answer the universal questions were all fated to remain temporally bound. Oblivious to the historical limitations which confined their thinking, as well as the historically contingent convictions which enthralled their thinking, past philosophers have been deluded. On such a view, the human condition is such that we are compelled to raise universal questions, but are doomed in any and all attempts to answer them. Of course, if one knew that all one’s attempts were so fated to fail, one would hardly be much inclined to make the effort. And, were someone strangely compelled to make the attempt, futile though it may be, his philosophic efforts would have to be prefaced by “a coherent reflection on his historical situation in order to emancipate himself as far as possible from the prejudices of his age” (25). As can readily be seen, this historical effort would be in the service of the unhistorical philosophic effort -- else, why bother?

Now supposedly ‘enlightened’ by historicism as to the absurd position of human thinking, we may still work to liberate ourselves from our historical situation and answer the universal questions. But if the historicist thesis is to remain true, our reflection on our situation is also an exercise in futility: though necessitated on the basis of the historicist insight, it is doomed to remain unsuccessful as a consequence of the historicist insight. Nor can we conclude that these ‘post historicist’ philosophic efforts are more philosophic than the “‘naive’ non-historical philosophy of the past.” The historicist philosopher is actually, contrary to initial appearances, “much more dogmatic than the average philosopher of the past” because his historicist commitment obliges him to

exclude from the outset (i.e., as possibly being true) all previous non-historicist philosophic alternatives (26).

Compounding the irony, Strauss points out that although historicism vaunts its study of the history of philosophy and its rigorous reflection on the present historical situation as indicating its philosophic superiority to ‘naive’ non-historical philosophy, historicists overlook the obvious possibility that comprehensive reflection on the present historical situation may be required only as a consequence of the peculiarities of the present historical situation, in particular the character of modern thought. Moreover, if one is rigorous in this effort to unshackle oneself from the “trends” dominating one’s age, one would be led to jettison historicism itself as one such “trend” -- indeed, as the most obvious, and obviously prejudicial of such trends. Recall that earlier Strauss had remarked that “as far as we can speak at all of the spirit of a time, we can assert with confidence that the spirit of our time is historicism” (3). Thus, by seriously and rigorously reflecting on ‘the spirit of our time’ -- on historicism -- we may come to see that there is, strictly speaking, no such thing.

In the very important conclusion to this the twenty-sixth paragraph of the essay, Strauss expresses the possibility that:

the modern philosopher is in much greater need of reflection on his situation because, having abandoned the resolve to look at things *sub specie aeternitatis*, he is much more exposed to, and enthralled by, the convictions and ‘trends’ dominating his age. Reflection on one’s historical situation may very well be no more than a remedy for a deficiency which has been caused by historicism, or rather by the deeper motives which express themselves in historicism, and which did not hamper the philosophic efforts of former ages (26).

XI Historicism and the Future of Philosophy

Strauss apparently delays expanding on what in particular about modern thought

lends historicism its plausibility, in order to consider further historicism's 'futuristic' character. We may notice, that Strauss has subtly shifted his focus from historicism's obscuring influence on the study of the history of philosophy, first to historicism's need for reflection on the present historical situation, and now to historicism's attitude towards the future. To this point in his analysis, however, historicism has introduced no use of history which was not accommodated in Strauss' opening discussion of political philosophy's unhistorical character. There Strauss had suggested that history and historical questions may be preliminary and auxiliary to political philosophy, but never integral to it. Thus far, he has shown that the fair-minded, 'objective' study of the history of political philosophy is an impossibility on the basis of historicism, as is its recommended coherent reflection on the present.

Now, in the twenty-seventh paragraph, Strauss notes that historicism seems "animated by the certainty that the future will bring about the realization of possibilities of which no one has ever dreamt, or can ever dream" (27). This total openness to the future is implied in historicism's commitment to the inescapable historical contingency of all human thinking. Strauss juxtaposes this openness to the non-historical political philosophy of the past which "lived not in such an open horizon" (27).

In elucidating this juxtaposition between historicism and non-historical political philosophy, Strauss elliptically introduces the specter of evolutionary theory into his treatment of historicism. The horizon of possible futures is closed (only?) so long as "the differences between men and angels and between men and brutes have not been abolished, or as long as there are political things" (27). In an eternally fixed natural order, limits to the possible can in principle be known. With respect to political things, (permanent) human nature would seem to indicate the limits of what can reasonably be hoped for, or

worked towards. Moreover, on this account -- Aristotle's account -- men are political by nature, only beasts and gods can live outside of the polity.⁵² Evolution, however, seems to blur the qualitative distinctions between the species, and thus appears to cast doubt upon the reality of natural identities/species, and thus also the philosophic importance of the Socratic "What is X?" question. Moreover, the modern state only further contributes to the impact of this teaching, based as it is on pseudo-histories of 'the state of nature', which makes the political association something artificial, something which itself came into being as a result of unfathomable evolutionary changes in man.

Thus, in an important sense, Strauss has *not* put off elucidating what in particular about modern thought lends historicism its plausibility. To the contrary, he subtly directs our attention to the "deadly truth" of evolution (for so Nietzsche characterizes it) as contributing mightily to the continued belief in historicism. However, in the face of the apparently crippling implications of evolutionary theory on the possibility of political philosophy, Strauss appears to duck. His strategy seems to be to argue as though the differences between men and brutes remain unproblematic. He continues to speak in terms of human nature, arguing that the species' natural limits are still knowable. He seems to stubbornly refuse to compromise the Aristotelian analysis of politics which he is asserting in the face of historicism. What, we are obliged to ask, could Strauss say in the face of the apparent 'truth' of evolution?⁵³

⁵² As Strauss notes in discussing classical political philosophy's being guided by the question of the best regime, "The peculiar manner of being of the best regime -- namely, it lacking actuality while being superior to all actual regimes -- has its ultimate reason in the dual nature of man, in the fact that man is the in-between being: in between brutes and gods" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p35).

⁵³ Strauss rarely mentions, let alone discusses, the implications of modern science and evolutionary theory for the ancient, or Aristotelian, account of the cosmos. This in spite of the fact that he grants that, "Natural right in its classic form is connected with a teleological view of the universe" and that "The teleological view of the universe, of which the teleological view of man forms a part, would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science" (*Natural Right and History*, p7-8). Nonetheless, in the essay 'The Crisis of Political Philosophy', Strauss indicates "the specific grounds on which it is claimed that Aristotle's political philosophy has been refuted. The most common reason is that modern natural science, or modern cosmology, having refuted Aristotelian cosmology (e.g., by demonstrating 'evolution'), has therewith the principle or the basis of Aristotelian political philosophy" (p92).

Strauss argues that in fact such “deadly truths” do not substantially change the procedure or attitude of philosophy. To note that we cannot know or foresee the “sensible or mad possibilities” which the future will disclose is not an insight original to post-Darwinian philosophy. “[I]t is hard to say anything at present about possibilities which are at present not even imagined” (27). Strauss recommends, therefore, our adopting the classical attitude towards “the possibilities which have been discovered, or even realized since”: “We must leave it to the political philosophers of the future to discuss the possibilities which will be known only in the future.” Thus the anticipation of presently unimaginable future changes “could not possibly influence the questions and the procedure of political philosophy” (27).

Is Strauss’ response adequate? Firstly, we must notice that the reality of natural kinds, or species, is in no way affected by evolutionary theory. Quite to the contrary, evolutionary theory is merely the positing of a mechanism or process whereby natural kinds can come to be. In fact, the emergence of stable self-propagating species remains, to my (confessedly inadequate) understanding of evolution and modern genetics, an unsolved problem within the neo-Darwinist account of evolution. As Strauss puts it in one of his rare explicit treatments of the subject, “But even granting that evolution is an established fact, that man has come into being out of another species, man is still essentially different from non-man. The fact of essential differences -- the fact that there are ‘forms’ -- has in no way been refuted by evolutionism.”⁵⁴ Secondly, the mechanism of natural selection itself indicates a natural standard of the good for each species -- a standard which may, like the best or just political order, be unfulfillable in a given set of circumstances -- which guides and directs a given individual’s activities. Thus, insofar as traditional political philosophy is the replacement of opinion with knowledge regarding the nature of political

⁵⁴ ‘The Crisis of Political Philosophy’, p92.

things and the best or just political order, as Strauss repeatedly characterizes it, he is correct in his conclusion that the questions and procedure of political philosophy remain largely undisturbed by evolutionary theory.

Ironically, the problem of unforeseen future changes (within the limits of the possible) and not evolution per se, emerges as the more challenging puzzle. Strauss grants that future change will bring about possibilities unforeseen by even the most far-sighted. But this observation compels us to work mightily to ensure that genuine philosophy remain a possibility in the future. For in responding to the call for prescience with respect to the future, Strauss makes one of his more naked allusions to Nietzsche. “We must leave it to the political philosophers of the future to discuss the possibilities which will be known only in the future.” It is for this reason that historicism is such a concern: it jeopardizes the possibility of philosophy both now and in the future. As Nietzsche observes: “When the historical sense reigns *without restraint*, and all its consequences are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live” (95/VII.1).

At first blush, however, this obvious allusion to the subtitle of *Beyond Good and Evil*, ‘Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future’, would seem to direct the reader’s attention to the mature or late Nietzsche, and not the youthful Nietzsche of the *Untimely Meditations*. That Strauss nonetheless has the *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* also in mind here in the twenty-seventh paragraph, however, is indisputable. Let us begin with the notion of ‘horizons’ which Strauss introduces at this point into his account of ‘Political Philosophy and History’. Strauss remarked that “non-historical political philosophy lived not in such an open horizon, but in a horizon closed by the possibilities known at the time”. Nietzsche’s employment of the idea of ‘horizons’ is no

where more prominent than in the second *Untimely Meditation*. In the first section of the essay Nietzsche sets down as a “universal law” that:

a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centered to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end (63/I.4).

To illustrate his point, Nietzsche compares a solitary dweller in the Alps -- whose narrow horizon keeps him healthy and vigorous, if unjust in his appraisals of his time, place, and actions -- to that of another individual, who though more just and better instructed, “sickens and collapses because the lines of his horizon are always restlessly changing” and he cannot bring himself to forget this (63/I.5). Later, in depicting modern man, Nietzsche informs us that “A certain excess of history” can deny youth of any of its natural gifts by “constantly shifting horizons and removing a protective atmosphere and thus preventing man from feeling and acting *unhistorically*.” This, Nietzsche describes as an “infinite horizon” (115/IX.9).

On Nietzsche’s explicit account, as on Strauss’ somewhat more guarded discussion, the ‘concept-quake’ which has so shaken and disturbed modern man’s horizons is the deadly truth of evolution. Leading up to the aforementioned “infinite horizon”, Nietzsche introduces the prospect of the total hegemony of becoming:

If... the doctrines of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal -- doctrines which I consider true but deadly -- are thrust upon the people for another generation with the rage for instruction which has now become normal, no one should be surprised if the people perishes of petty egoism, ossification and greed, falls apart and ceases to be a people (112-3/VII.9).

Nietzsche, like Strauss, is concerned primarily with the political consequences of such a doctrine -- what happens when such a doctrine is taught. It thus becomes obvious

why Strauss deals so gingerly with the “deadly truths” of evolution in his essay, arguing on the one hand as if the matter had not even been raised, and other the other that it essentially changes nothing. Recall his earlier reference to his own political and historical situation: “In these circumstances we are compelled to state explicitly that prior to careful investigation we cannot exclude the possibility that a political philosophy which emerged many centuries ago is *the true political philosophy*” (16). The Aristotelian, or more generally, the pre-modern understanding of political philosophy is not made obsolete by modern science or the modern state (as most of Strauss’ colleagues and contemporaries seem to assume) though it may indeed require a monumental modification or reinterpretation. However, in order to see this, we must follow Nietzsche’s advice and return to the past with our deadly truths in hand:

The best we can do is confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away (76/III.5).

Thus, the circumstances demand a defense of pre-modern philosophy in the face of modern historicist thought. But the discoveries of modern natural science, and perhaps the ascendancy of the modern state, are not to be jettisoned in this return to the ancients.

However, Strauss will not go out of his way either to emphasize to his readers the problem of evolution, nor will he further contribute to the ‘ossifying’ the humanity of his contemporaries by openly introducing the specter of these ‘deadly truths’. In sum, for both Strauss and Nietzsche, the issue is not whether evolution is true, the issue is how it ought to be approached in the context of the modern state. In such circumstances, the modern state’s reinterpretation of the standard of freedom, from public spiritedness to unrestrained egoism will only accelerate its descent down the path towards “systems of

individualist egoism, brotherhoods for the rapacious exploitation of non-brothers, and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity" (113/IX.7). Thus, both Strauss and Nietzsche regard as essential a return to pre-modern politics as well as pre-modern philosophy within the context of the modern state and modern science.

XII A Cab to the End of the Road

Strauss now directs his readers' attentions to the reflexively self-contradictory character of the historicist thesis. The historicist maintains that all attempts to answer the fundamental questions with trans-temporal or eternal answers is symptomatic of the deluded character of non-historicist political philosophy. Strauss shows, however, that even exponents of this second form of historicism (such as John Dewey) cannot avoid offering universal answers to "what a 'moral situation' is and to what '*the* distinctively moral traits,' or '*the* virtues' are." Thus, Strauss concludes, this "more sophisticated" form of historicism (7) "merely replaced one kind of finality by another kind of finality, by the final conviction that all human answers are essentially and radically historical" (28).

Only a thoroughgoing historicism, an historicism which admitted its own destiny to be replaced by a future non-historicist philosophy, "could claim to have done away with all pretense to finality" (29). Such a conclusion is inevitable on the basis of historicism itself. Returning to his earlier image of a road on which rigorous or radical historicists "go to the end", Strauss remarks, "Historicism is not a cab which one can stop at his convenience". That is, one has to take the cab to the end of the road, or not get on at all.⁵⁵ We have seen that even the "more thoughtful forms of historicism" exempt

⁵⁵ The more frightening implication of the image of the cab and the road, however, is that once one gets in and takes it all the way to the end of the road, one will more than likely have to pay a substantial price, perhaps more than one can afford.

themselves from the annihilating implications of their thesis. The conclusion of this reflection is that the historicist must face with total equanimity the prospect of his own thesis' inevitable destiny to be replaced, and (moreover) cannot consider a return to non-historicist philosophy a decline.⁵⁶

And here, upon holding forth the prospect of an apparently still viable thoroughgoing historicism,⁵⁷ -- an historicism which, however, cannot rationally justify or defend itself, Strauss would have us notice that historicism itself obliges us to reflect on "the essential relation of historicism to modern man" (29). Interestingly, he casts this relation between modern man and historicism in terms of a "need". Strauss asks his readers to consider what specific need of modern man, "as distinguished from pre-modern man" "underlies his passionate turn to history" (29). This shift in focus from what is effectively a philosophic critique of historicism, concerned primarily with its truth or falsehood, to a further explanation of the genesis of historicism out of a need which emerged historically, marks a transition in Strauss' essay towards the affirmative. For Strauss promises to "elucidate the question" through a consideration of "the most convincing" argument "in favor of the fusion of philosophic and historical studies" (29).

XIII The Most Convincing Fusion

Returning to the beginning of the essay, and defining political philosophy in its original and classic formulation as "the attempt to replace our opinions about political

⁵⁶ Indeed, thought through, the radical historicist can offer no argument for historicism nor any evidence, historical or otherwise, by which to privilege his own perspective, and thus no reason for accepting historicism. The radical historicist thus cannot argue against those who would prefer to see it repudiated or superseded. It can only be posited as a mysterious dispensation of an unfathomable fate destined to be overcome by something else. This view of the cosmos, far from being distinctly modern, returns us to the quarrels of the pre-Socratics, awaiting someone to point out that such an account is incomplete and unnatural because inhuman, inhumane, and impolitic. Note on the plan to *Natural Right and History*.

⁵⁷ Which is the focus of Strauss' treatment of historicism in *Natural Right and History*. This thoroughgoing historicism which does not get fully treated here, is, we notice, post-Nietzschean, i.e., Heideggerean. More than this, it is worth noting that here, as in *Natural Right and History*, Heidegger's name is never mentioned.

original and classic formulation as “the attempt to replace our opinions about political fundamentals by knowledge of them”, Strauss identifies as the first task of this “most convincing” fusion of philosophic and historical studies, the subjection of our current political ideas to critical analysis. Through considering history, in particular the history of political philosophy, we come to recognize that our ideas are only partly our own. Most of them are “abbreviations and residues of the thought of the past” (30) which we acquire from our teachers. However, as we were shown in ‘What is Liberal Education?’, there cannot be an infinite regress. That is, there must be original teachers who are not in turn pupils. Here in ‘Political Philosophy and History’, we see Strauss again recommending our return to these original teachers as they are preserved in books, in order to recover the lucidity which characterized their thought. For there exists the possibility that our political ideas as we have inherited them may have undergone significant modification, and the modifiers may not have effected their changes with full lucidity. Like the illiterate tribe ruled by age-old custom we were introduced to in ‘What is Liberal Education?’, we will be subject to the whims of our political leaders and educators unless we ourselves return to the founding texts of our philosophic and political traditions. Only in so doing can we verify, by comparing our political (and philosophic) ideas to those of our founders, that the ancient teaching has not been distorted, diluted, or otherwise transformed. Indeed, such an effort is needed if we are to assess critically, for ourselves, our political ideas with an eye to their justice and truth. “This can be done only by means of the history of political ideas.” It is in this manner, and to this extent, that philosophy and history are fused.

Just as Nietzsche had done, Strauss effectively grants that “our time is rightly proud” of its cultivation of history in at least one respect. Historicism does provide an

indication, and the tools, and the inspiration, by means of which it will itself be overcome. As we have seen historicism necessitates, on its own premises, that it will be replaced, thus inspiring the young to work for its supplanting. Secondly, historicism points us towards the past as a means of coming to see the peculiarities of the present, and of historicism itself. And thirdly, in “divining” or “discovering” the standards of historical exactness in light of which the past can be seen as it saw itself, historicism provides the tools by which historicism itself will come to be seen as merely the contingent product of historical circumstance, a peculiar ‘trend’ dominating our time, ripe for replacement.

The historical aspect of this proposed fusion itself reveals the distinctively unhistorical character of all previous thought. We need only “glance” at Aristotle’s *Politics* to see that Aristotle did not “need to bother” about the history of his political ideas (31). This ‘glancing’ observation serves to highlight the difference between Aristotle’s historical situation and ours: he did not need to bother about the history of his ideas, whereas we do. Strauss remarks that, “The most natural, and the most cautious, explanation of this paradoxical fact would be, that perhaps our political ideas have a character fundamentally different from that of the political ideas of former ages” (31). Namely, that they can only be clarified by means of historical studies.

Strauss next offers an alternative expression of this claim that our ideas require clarification through historical studies. Whereas in the previous formulation Aristotle was used to distinguish this proposed fusion of philosophic and historical effort from the ancient, unhistorical model, Strauss here chooses for illustrating this same difference, a modern, an early modern, famous for his skepticism and his historical work, David

Hume.⁵⁸ Strauss' selection of Hume is most peculiar, for he is a thinker Strauss rarely refers to. Why an eighteenth century modern? Why a modern 'skeptic'? Firstly, Strauss' choice of Hume supports his earlier claim about the unhistorical or rather non-historicist character of earlier modern thought (5). Secondly and related, Strauss's appropriation of Hume's language implies that Hume was aware of the different status of inherited and independently acquired 'impressions', thus indicating that the early moderns were not oblivious to problem presented by the cumulative and incremental character of modern science. Hume's famous skepticism is in fact radically anti-historical insofar as it puts all knowing on the same problematic footing.⁵⁹ Certainly the emphasis put on evidence directly presented to the senses makes all inherited or progressive accumulation of knowledge questionable. Finally, we must observe that Nietzsche also refers to Hume, something he rarely does, in his essay on history. Nietzsche quotes approvingly Hume's mocking characterization of the 'historical' man who would not be willing to relive his past because he hopes for a better future which will be disclosed in the 'process' of history. In spite of the 'unhistorical' character of all his acting and living in the world, it is this faith in a 'process' that encourages the 'historical man' to go on living (65/I.6). On Strauss' account, this belief in a 'process' is the future-directedness of modern man and his belief in progress. Furthermore, Nietzsche's quoting Hume here also indicates his awareness that Hume and his fellow architects of modernity did not

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that while Strauss rarely refers to Hume, he does so in his discussion of historicism in *Natural Right and History* (p20). There Strauss explicitly distinguishes skepticism from historicism, even from the tradition which gave rise to historicism. However, later, in discussing Burke, Strauss connects Burke with Hume and Locke (p312). Notice that both Locke and Hume appear in the present essay, and that in his historical treatment of historicism, the Burkean view was prominent. Cf., Pippin on Strauss and Hume in *Idealism as Modernism*, p215, note14.

⁵⁹ In his essay 'Relativism', Strauss flatly declares that, "Hume still viewed human things in the light of man's unchangeable nature; he did not yet conceive of man as an essentially historical being" (*Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p22). Similarly, in *Natural Right and History*, Strauss asserts, "Taken by itself, this philosophic critique of philosophic and scientific thought -- a continuation of the efforts of Hume and of Kant -- would lead to skepticism. But skepticism and historicism are two entirely different things" (p20).

wholeheartedly affirm this progressivism. But, compounding the irony, Nietzsche's quote from Hume is itself a poetic couplet that Hume 'inherited' from John Dryden.⁶⁰

Thus, appropriating Hume's "convenient terminology" (which consists of little more than a single word and presents no obvious need for citation), Strauss proceeds to describe our "ideas" in terms of "impressions" (32). Strauss informs us that in order to clarify our "ideas", we are obliged to "trace each of our ideas to the impressions from which it is derived" (32). Though all "impressions" derive originally from first-hand experience, we nonetheless must distinguish between those elements of our own "ideas" which result directly from our own "impressions", and those which emerge from a transformation or reinterpretation of "ideas" originally derived from "impressions" of other people. Strauss again uses the examples of the city and the state. Studiously avoiding explicitly offering an epistemological or ontological account of the relationship between "impressions" and "ideas", Strauss counts on his reader's intuition to validate his claims. The origin of our idea of the city, Strauss tells us, is akin to the origin of our idea of dog: both emerge from a plurality of experiential impressions of single, particular instances of the kind of thing they are. In contrast, our idea of the state, "emerged partly owing to the transformation, or reinterpretation, of more elementary ideas, of the idea of the city in particular" (32). Ideas like the city and the dog do not require history in order to clarify. Ideas which are the result of transformations of more elementary ideas require clarification "by means of the history of ideas."

In thus moving from the example of Aristotle -- who needed no history but "who was responsible for much of the most outstanding historical research done in classical antiquity", to Hume, who was also finally "unhistorical" (if something of a modern in his

⁶⁰ Nietzsche may or may not have known this, but Strauss could be using that *petit-fait* to his own purposes.

affirmation of science) but who also wrote a lengthy and very highly regarded history of England -- Strauss points to the specific differences and similarities between the ancients and the early moderns. Neither Aristotle nor Hume, on Strauss' account, were adverse to history, but they surely did not confuse their philosophic efforts with their historical inquiries. Nonetheless, as the example of the city and the state make clear, philosophizing after the advent of modernity requires additional effort to clarify, by tracing to their origins, each of our ideas. In particular, in order to understand our politics, the politics of the state, we are obliged to return to the idea of the city. Strauss is surely also implying an analogous necessity in the study of the history of political philosophy: in order to understand Hume, we must understand Aristotle.⁶¹

Strauss now cautions us to consider very carefully his choice of the examples of the city and the state. "The choice of these examples was not accidental; for the difference with which we are concerned is the specific difference between the character of modern philosophy on the one hand, and that of pre-modern philosophy on the other" (33). One embrasive puzzle is contained in this caution. Why does Strauss, who has so studiously kept the focus of his essay on political philosophy, here inform us that the difference between the city and the state, or at least our ideas of the city and the state, corresponds to the difference between modern and pre-modern philosophy -- philosophy *simpliciter*, not *political* philosophy? Here we may recall that in the ninth paragraph we were warned that "An adequate discussion of historicism would be identical with a critical analysis of modern philosophy in general." There, as here, Strauss avoided affixing the modifier "political" to "philosophy". And yet, as we have seen, the transition to the

⁶¹ Here again, Strauss subtly shifts between the epistemological approaches of Aristotle and Hume and their politics. Strauss would have us look at Aristotle's *Politics*, and Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*, or *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Insodoing he effectively asks us to compare Aristotle's epistemology to Hume's, and Hume's politics to that of Aristotle. This is only further emphasized in Strauss use of examples to illustrate his thumbnail sketch of Hume's epistemology: the city, the state, and the dog.

state from the city, and the remarkable correspondence between the chronology of that transformation and the move from non-historical to historicist political philosophy, would seem to indicate that the emergence of historicism is somehow essentially connected to *political* philosophy in particular. This, we would suggest, is *the* overarching interpretive question in this essay.

Strauss now cites Hegel's description of this difference between pre-modern (ancient and medieval) philosophy and modern philosophy. Again we are implicitly invited to consider what is shown in this transition from Aristotle to Hume to Hegel. Aristotle needed no history to clarify the political ideas obtaining in his age. Hume, however, identifies "impressions" or "first-hand experience" as the source of all our ideas, thus cautioning us to examine the (possibly historical) basis of our own ideas. Hegel now opposes the "natural consciousness" of antiquity, which could simply and directly philosophize "about everything it came across", with the modern "individual" who "finds the abstract form ready made" (33). Hegel thus recognizes the specific difference between the ancient and the modern position vis a vis the phenomena.⁶² Through Hegel, Strauss introduces a fundamental concept which pervades his entire corpus: the natural consciousness.

Classical philosophy, on Strauss' account, takes this natural consciousness as its departure point.⁶³ On the ancient model, "fundamental concepts" emerged out of the comparison of the political concepts obtaining in one's own age and place with the phenomena themselves. These results of ancient reflection "remained the basis of the

⁶² As Strauss himself puts it, "Compared with classical political philosophy, all later political thought, whatever else its merits may be, and in particular modern political thought, has a derivative character. This means that in later times there has occurred an estrangement from the simple and primary issues. This has given to political philosophy the character of 'abstractness'..." *What is Political Philosophy?*, p28.

⁶³ As commentators such as Catherine Zuckert and Gregory Bruce Smith have rightly observed, Strauss' granting of primacy to the "natural consciousness", sometimes the "pre-theoretical", or "pre-scientific awareness" indicates the affinity between Strauss' approach and the post-Hegelian philosophical current known as 'phenomenology'.

philosophic efforts of the Middle Ages” (33), but became merely departure points for the moderns. “They were partly taken for granted and partly modified by the founders of modern political philosophy” (33). Strauss warns that they then underwent a subsequent modification in which form “they underlie the political philosophy or political science of our time” (33).⁶⁴ Strauss here, then, acknowledges *two* distinct transformations, culminating in the foundation of contemporary historicist political thought. Earlier in the essay we noted a similar feature, though there Strauss focuses on the “fundamental change” of the sixteenth century (5), which was followed by a series of lesser more gradual changes, culminating in the synthesis of Hegel. It is because these two transformations were transformations of the ancient account of politics, that we need to understand the ancient account of *politics* out of which our ideas have emerged.

Furthermore, because the latter transformation was a transformation of modern political philosophy, we need to study the moderns. In short, in order to understand the character of our own natural or pre-philosophic understanding of political matters, we must study the controversy between the ancients and the moderns. Only thus will the specific character of whatever modifications the original ancient concepts underwent at the hands of the moderns, and the subsequent modification of the original modern teaching at the hands of historicism, become clear to us. Thus emancipated as far as possible (25) from the “spirit of our age” (3), we may actually begin to philosophize again. We will have crawled out from the pit we have dug in our cave.⁶⁵

Let us pause here to consider what Strauss is indicating in thus moving from Aristotle to Hume to Hegel. Recall that, in turning to this most convincing fusion of

⁶⁴ “Those presuppositions [of the contemporary social scientist] prove to be modifications of the principles of modern political philosophy, and these principles in turn prove to be modifications of the principles of classical political philosophy. One cannot understand the presuppositions of present-day social science without a return to classical political philosophy” (*The City and Man*, p10).

⁶⁵ One of Strauss’ most memorable images, ‘the pit in the cave’ receives its fullest exploration in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p156-160.

philosophic and historical studies, Strauss is endeavoring to elucidate “the question as to what specific need characteristic of modern man, as distinguished from pre-modern man, underlies his passionate turn to history” (29). By way of answering this question, Strauss points to this particular fusion of history and philosophy. Consider, in this connection, Strauss’ parenthetical remark that Aristotle “was responsible for much of the most outstanding historical research done in classical antiquity” (4). And that Strauss described Hegel as “the outstanding philosopher of the nineteenth century” (5) whose teaching “was meant to be a ‘synthesis’ of philosophy and history”. Strauss’ only other usage of ‘outstanding’ in the essay occurs in describing “some of the most outstanding political philosophers” who “up to and including the eighteenth century... quite justifiably preferred the city to the modern state” of his time(17). Are we to see that Hume, historian and philosopher, was perhaps one of them, although not commonly recognized as such? Or are we to see it was the outstanding effort of individuals like Hume that brought about the state that could finally be regarded as superior to the ancient city? He did write a political treatise devoted to demonstrating that a large republic was possible. Furthermore, while Aristotle’s philosophizing was unhistorical in spite of his outstanding historical research, Hume’s philosophizing, though also unhistorical, relied in important respects upon history, and his view of philosophy definitely shaped his historical inquiries (Hume is generally understood to have written ‘Whig’ history, or history interpreted primarily in terms of its contribution to the present). Finally, Hegel’s philosophizing is historical through and through, for Hegel interprets the movement from ancient to modern philosophizing as a progression. On the Hegelian view, philosophy and history become indistinguishable. Paralleling this on the practical level, the modern State becomes the realization of this historico-philosophic progression -- the realization

of reason on earth.⁶⁶

Strauss now introduces a substantial qualification to what he has thus far presented -- a qualification, we should note, based upon the outcome of historical studies. "For medieval philosophy too was 'dependent' on classical philosophy, and yet it was not in need of the history of philosophy as an integral part of its philosophic efforts" (34). We moderns, however, are in need of "an intrinsically philosophic history of philosophy" (34). That is, to resort to Nietzschean terminology, history in the service of an unhistorical power.

Strauss proceeds to elaborate the difference between the medieval situation and the contemporary situation. For the medieval philosopher, Aristotle's *Politics* was not 'history', his study of the *Politics* was 'unhistorical'. When we look at Aristotle's *Politics*, however, we see, not only at the outset, but throughout our studies, a document of the past, an historical document. For the medieval student of Aristotle, Aristotle was "authoritative", and always "contemporaneous with him" (34). He merely adapted Aristotle to "circumstances which Aristotle could not have foreseen". The early moderns, however, self-consciously and deliberately broke with Aristotle in particular, both his politics and his science. In order to understand their thinking, it must be contrasted with Aristotle's thinking, whereas Aristotle's thinking (and that of the Medievals) is not in need of being contrasted with anything else.

The differences between our situation and the medieval situation are striking and important. But let us not overlook Strauss' remark in 'What is Political Philosophy?' that in *all* post-classical epochs, "the philosophers' study of political things was mediated by a tradition of political philosophy which acted like a screen between the

⁶⁶ On Strauss' view, Hegel demanded "that political philosophy refrain from contriving a state as it ought to be, or from teaching the state how it should be, and that it try to understand the present and actual state as something essentially rational". This reorientation of political philosophy "amounts to a rejection of the *raison d'être* of classical political philosophy" (*What is Political Philosophy?*, p88).

philosopher and political things, regardless of whether the individual philosopher cherished or rejected that tradition.”⁶⁷ Secondly, we note that medieval philosophy was not simply meditation on Aristotle, but it was meditation on Aristotle in the context of religion, most prominently, of Christianity, but also of Islam and Judaism. The medieval situation too was a fusion of philosophy and something else, namely religion. Nietzsche, we might notice, likens the contemporary preoccupation with history to a religious impulse. Furthermore, Strauss has identified the religious situation in which medieval philosophizing took place merely as a set of circumstances which Aristotle could not have foreseen, much as he does with the ascendancy of the modern state. There he remarks that the reinterpretation of the ancient standards of freedom and civilization “could not have been foreseen by classical political philosophy” (17). Strauss, one may conclude, is advocating a restoration of pre-modern philosophy in the present circumstances of the modern state and modern science, but the distinction between the modern context and that of the medievals has not been made altogether persuasive.

A second factor, specific to modern man, underlies his “need” for history: namely, that “modern thought is in all its forms, directly or indirectly, determined by the idea of progress” (34). It is thus inevitable that it will have lost the “contemporaneity... with its basis” which characterized ancient and medieval thought. This orientation towards progress thus obscures the first and most important historical element in modern thinking -- that it represents a break from or modification of Aristotle. On Strauss’ account, the idea of progress “implies that the most elementary questions can be settled once and for all so that future generations can dispense with their further discussion, but can erect on the foundations once laid an ever-growing structure” (34). The foundations, some taken from ancient thought, others set down in explicit opposition to ancient thought, are thus

⁶⁷ *What is Political Philosophy?*, p27.

covered up by this edifice -- indeed, buried ever more deeply with the passing centuries.⁶⁸

Proof for the solidity of these foundations is found in the continued growth of the structure.

This, of course, is the model of modern natural science. Bacon and Descartes, for example, self-consciously set out to instigate just such an ever-growing scientific edifice. Often they even employ the architectural/ foundational metaphor Strauss here appropriates.⁶⁹

Nietzsche also makes generous use of the metaphor of architecture and foundations. Moreover, he, like Strauss connects such language to the early moderns. Consider his references to the “architect of the future” and his demand that the “historical drive... also contain a drive to construct”, that “a future already alive in anticipation [be permitted] to raise its house on the ground thus liberated” (94/VI.8, 95/VII.1). Similarly, in discussing the modern state, he uses language of “erecting... on the foundation” (114/IX.7). Finally in the tenth section, Nietzsche warns that “As cities collapse and grow desolate when there is an earthquake and man erects his house on volcanic land only in fear and trembling and only briefly, so life itself caves in and grows weak and fearful when the concept-quake caused by science robs man of the foundation of all his rest and security” (120-1/X.10).

Philosophy, however, Strauss now points out, is not appeased even by solid foundations and a growing edifice, but demands, rather, “lucidity and truth” (34). “A special kind of inquiry becomes necessary whose purpose it is to keep alive the recollection, and the problem, of the foundations hidden by progress. This philosophic inquiry is the history of philosophy or of science” (34). Notice, Strauss has subtly

⁶⁸ “[I]t is of the essence of traditions that they cover or conceal their humble foundations by erecting impressive edifices on them” (*Natural Right and History*, p31).

⁶⁹ E.g., Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, II(13-14).

returned us to the original (Greek) meaning of *historia*: ‘inquiry’. In so doing, Strauss begins to point towards the unhistorical character of ‘the philosophy of the future’ which he announces at the conclusion of the essay. At once a return and an advance, or progression.

Notice also that Strauss has introduced a further subtle textual shift, one which points directly towards the central obstacle to a return to ‘unhistorical’ philosophy: namely, science. Here, near the end of his essay, Strauss begins to speak of “philosophy or of science”. That is, Strauss is reminding his readers of the divorce between the two which was itself unknown to the unhistorical thinking of Aristotle and the medievals. If there is to be a return to unhistorical philosophy, it may have to endure this divorce from science, or achieve some sort of reconciliation which places the unhistorical thinking in control of the incremental and cumulative (historical) sciences.

Strauss begins the penultimate paragraph of his essay with an imperative. “We must distinguish between inherited knowledge and independently acquired knowledge” (35). Strauss characterizes both inherited knowledge and independently acquired knowledge as “philosophic or scientific”. Of course, on the original understanding of philosophy -- as Strauss has been at pains to show -- there is no such thing as inherited knowledge. The very idea implies modern science wherein the practitioner typically relies upon “inherited knowledge”. By contrast, Strauss describes independently acquired knowledge as “the philosophic or scientific knowledge a mature scholar acquires in his unbiased intercourse, as fully enlightened as possible as to its horizon and its presuppositions, with his subject matter” (35). Strauss does not attribute philosophic or scientific knowledge to a mature *philosopher*. Philosophers, it seems, as in the Middle

Ages, must first be scholars.⁷⁰

The belief in progress, however, tends to obscure this distinction between independently acquired and inherited knowledge. The very language of science -- Strauss illustrates with “body of knowledge” and “results of research” (35) -- leads to an equal valuation of both kinds of knowledge. This deep seated scientistism can be counteracted only by a “special effort... to transform inherited knowledge into genuine knowledge by revitalizing its original discovery, and to discriminate between the genuine and the spurious elements of what claims to be inherited knowledge” (35).

Upon reflection, we recognize that Strauss’ own survey of the origin and genesis of historicism demonstrates the fundamental necessity of philosophy making this distinction. For as Strauss shows in the earlier chronological account of the emergence of historicism questionable if not outright invalid conclusions were drawn on the basis of a misinterpretation of the historical record. These questionable conclusions were then never reviewed with an eye to returning to unhistorical political philosophy. As Strauss remarks in *Natural Right and History*:

Above all in the transition from early (theoretical) to radical (“existentialist”) historicism, the “experience of history” was never submitted to critical analysis. It was taken for granted that it is a genuine experience and not a questionable interpretation of experience. The question was not raised whether what is really experienced does not allow of an entirely different and possibly more adequate interpretation.⁷¹

For the third time, Strauss has identified his vision for the remedial study of the history of philosophy as ‘philosophic’. Here he concludes, “This truly philosophic function is fulfilled by the history of philosophy or of science” (35). Previously he had

⁷⁰ This would seem to be the implication of Strauss’ cave within the cave metaphor: that prior to the philosophic *anabasis*, the contemporary would-be philosopher must undertake scholarly labor to free himself of contemporary obscuring and unnatural prejudices. Nietzsche informs us, at the conclusion of his discussion of the *Untimely Mediations* in *Ecce Homo*, that “For a time, I too *had* to be a scholar”.

⁷¹ *Natural Right and History*, p32.

remarked, “This philosophic inquiry is the history of philosophy or of science” (34).

Prior to that we hear him describe such studies as an “intrinsically philosophic history of philosophy” (33). This fusion, no longer tentatively described as “most convincing”, but now advocated with imperatives is Strauss’ solution to historicism, and the crisis of modernity it has brought about.

For anyone aware of Nietzsche’s association with ‘the philosophy of the future’, the concluding paragraph of Strauss’ essay serves as an acknowledgement of its Nietzschean heritage.

If, as we must, we apply historicism to itself, we must explain historicism in terms of the specific character of modern thought, or, more precisely of modern philosophy. In doing so, we observe that modern political philosophy or science, as distinguished from pre-modern political philosophy or science, is in need of the history of political philosophy or science as an integral part of its own efforts, since, as modern political philosophy or science itself admits or even emphasizes, it consists to a considerable extent of inherited knowledge whose basis is no longer contemporaneous or immediately accessible. The recognition of this necessity cannot be mistaken for historicism. For historicism asserts that the fusion of historical and philosophic questions marks in itself a progress beyond ‘naïve’ non-historical philosophy, whereas we limit ourselves to asserting that that fusion is, within the limits indicated, inevitable on the basis of modern philosophy, as distinguished from pre-modern philosophy or ‘the philosophy of the future’ (36).

To fully appreciate Strauss conclusion, we need to revisit the “three-fold must” Nietzsche announces as the project for one who would seek to overthrow the bogus historical culture of the present:

[T]he origin of historical culture -- its quite radical conflict with the spirit of any ‘new age’, any ‘modern awareness’ -- this origin *must* itself be known historically, history *must* itself resolve the problem of history, knowledge *must* turn its sting against itself -- this three-fold *must* is the imperative of any ‘new age’, supposing this age really does contain anything new, powerful, original and promising more life (102-3/VIII.2).

To assuage any lingering doubts as to Strauss' Nietzschean intentions, simply compare Nietzsche's "three-fold must" with Strauss' summary remarks. Strauss begins noting that we "must apply historicism to itself", just as Nietzsche declares that "knowledge", by which he surely means historical knowledge in particular, "*must* turn its sting against itself". Both Strauss and Nietzsche recognize the incoherence of the contemporary preoccupation with history precisely in light of history. Nietzsche declares that "the origin of historical culture... *must* be known historically". Strauss' essay is devoted precisely to providing an account of the origin and evolution of historicism from out of early modern thought. Here, in his concluding remarks, he insists, "we must explain historicism in terms of the specific character of modern thought". Nietzsche avers that "history *must* itself resolve the problem of history". Strauss' solution, or remedy to the sickness of historicism is a philosophic history of political philosophy, to which he devoted most of his own scholarly life.

XIV The Remedy

In the concluding section of his consideration of history, Nietzsche conspicuously and repeatedly describes the contemporary historical excess as a "malady", a "sickness". "[Contemporary life] is sick with many illnesses... what chiefly concerns us here is that it is suffering from the *malady of history*" (120/X.7). Thus, like Strauss, he calls for a remedy. Youth, on Nietzsche's account, naturally and clairvoyantly knows that it has lost a "paradise of health". Moreover, it "also divines with the curative instinct of this same nature how this paradise is to be regained; it knows the medicine and balsam against the malady of history, against excess of history: but what is this medicine called?" (120/X.7). So, paradoxical as it might seem -- but Nietzsche insists it should not -- "the

antidote to the historical” is called by names compounded of the “poison” itself: it is a synthesis of “the unhistorical and the suprahistorical” (120/X.8). Nietzsche, just as does Strauss, depicts his “antidote” or “medicine” -- his remedy -- as a fusion.

We have been told, however, that the men of today are virtually born grey-haired(101/VIII.1) so quickly are they infected with the superstition that they are latecomers(94/VI.8, 106-7/VIII.6). This scholarly education to which the young are subjected de-natures them, to the point where those studying the history of philosophy have become like eunuchs for whom one woman is like any another (86-7/V.4). It is through these pre-maturely ‘mature’ scholars, however, that the demise of the historical madness is to be brought about. Nietzsche appeals to their not yet deadened instincts of youth, and to the natural appeal of youth, vigor and health. They are to rediscover their own youth, and a *world* of naturalness and health through their very ‘maturity’, and ‘agedness’. Thus, through drawing the parallels between the “inborn grey-hairedness” of the youth, and the belief in the old-age of the world, Nietzsche is effectively linking the recovery of youth to the rediscovery of the youth of the world, and of the Greeks in particular. He is thus attempting to use the historical madness, and the belief in the old-age of the world in particular, as a means of reversing this aging process. Notice that Nietzsche repeatedly refers to his own youthfulness in the essay, in particular his lack of “mature experience”, which he grants to himself as a pupil of the Greeks.

Strauss, we have noted is, in his own far less imagistic language, advocating precisely the same use of history to correct its abuse. And as we indicated in highlighting the reference near the conclusion of his essay to the work of the “mature scholar” returning to ‘naive’ non-historical political philosophy of the past, Strauss is using a near identical pair of oppositions.

Both Strauss and Nietzsche begin their respective considerations of history by distinguishing the two elements of what will become fusions. But here the comparison seems to deteriorate, for Strauss advocates a certain fusion of history and philosophy, whereas Nietzsche's "antidote" is compounded of "*the unhistorical and the suprahistorical*". As we noted at the outset, however, quite what Nietzsche means by these two powers is not immediately obvious. He is clear, however, that the unhistorical is to supervise any use of history, for "the capacity to feel to a certain degree unhistorically... constitutes the foundation upon which alone anything sound, healthy and great, anything truly human, can grow" (63/I.5). Only through this supervision of the use of history by the unhistorical "did man become man" (64/I.5). Recall that we observed how striking the parallels were between this depiction of the original relationship between life and history and Strauss' account of political philosophy, in particular its historical origins. Furthermore we noted distinctly 'philosophic' imagery in Nietzsche's illustration of what he intends by the unhistorical. In particular we pointed to the example of a man "seized by a vehement passion for a woman or a great idea" (64/I.5). We may parenthetically add to this the remark that very few among us are ever seized by passions for ideas which compare in vehemence to those more 'stinging' erotic impulses.⁷²

But, as we noted, the obvious objection to giving this priority to the "unhistorical" is that Nietzsche seems to relate philosophy to the 'suprahistorical'. Nietzsche describes the 'suprahistorical' as "wise" and aloof, uninterested in taking worldly matters, and history in particular, seriously. The suprahistorical men are "unanimous in the proposition: the past and present are one, that is to say, with all their diversity identical in all that is typical and, as the omnipresence of imperishable types, a

⁷² *Republic*, 548d.

motionless structure of value that cannot alter and a significance that is always the same” (66/I.8). This perspective on life leaves one altogether inactive and ineffectual. However, we observed that this does not accurately describe the great philosophers of the tradition; they were not truly inactive, but, quite to the contrary, “commanders and legislators”⁷³ and “architects of the future” (98/VI.4). In short, they were not simply suprahistorical individuals. Rather, they were political philosophers in the full sense: they synthesized the *vita contemplativa* with the *vita activa* in and through their writings.

With such an understanding of the ‘suprahistorical’ and the ‘unhistorical’, we are prepared to see just how close Strauss’ proposed remedial fusion is to Nietzsche’s. The ‘suprahistorical’ vantage on Nietzsche’s own account only emerges if one can “scent out and retrospectively breath the unhistorical atmosphere within which every great historical event has taken place” (64-5/I.6). If we grant what Nietzsche holds to be true --that “the greatest thoughts are the greatest deeds”⁷⁴ -- then there would seem to be little to distinguish this suprahistorical vantage from what Strauss sees as the outcome of the study of the history of political philosophy. Both emerge as meditations on the greatest unhistorical deeds. Nietzsche, notice, characterizes the ‘suprahistorical’ as leading “the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable” (120/X.9). Strauss defends the study of the history of political philosophy on the grounds that it points to the timelessness of the philosophic questions. This, on Strauss’ understanding, is what is constant throughout the tradition. Elsewhere he goes so far as to characterize Plato’s ideas as the timeless problems. It is worth noting in this connection that the word ‘question’ occurs sixty times in the essay. Strauss’ fusion, described as a philosophic study of the history of philosophy, is then

⁷³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 211.

⁷⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 285.

directly parallel to Nietzsche's fusion of the suprahistorical and the unhistorical. The suprahistorical corresponds to the study of the history of political philosophy with an eye to its unhistorical character, that is, paying particular attention to its status as deed, as political. The unhistorical would correspond to the supervising philosophic impulse guiding such a study. As confirmation that this is how Nietzsche understands the fusion, we recall that he characterizes philosophy as feminine, speaking of it as "the honest, naked goddess" (85/V.3) and had earlier illustrated the 'unhistorical' impulse through the example of a man seized with a passion for a woman. The 'unhistorical' thus ensures that such study serves life, while the suprahistorical discloses what is timeless, and constant. The great deeds of the great political philosophers of the past are themselves to become the subject of philosophic reflection with an eye to the future.

As indicated, this use of history to counteract its abuse is acknowledged by both Strauss and Nietzsche to be merely remedial, and not itself a 'progression'. That is, Strauss advocates this use of history for the sake of a possible return to the 'unhistorical' character of "pre-modern philosophy" in the future, just as Nietzsche holds forth the prospect of a return to unhistorical philosophy in the future as a result of his fusion of the unhistorical and the suprahistorical. Following the delineation of his "three-fold must", Nietzsche proceeds to point the Germans back towards antiquity, first to the "Alexandrian-Roman world of culture", and ultimately to the "original ancient Greek world of greatness, naturalness and humanity". Strauss sees the goal as a return to what Hegel had called the "natural consciousness", a basis for thinking that is essentially connected to the ancient city. Nietzsche, just as Strauss does, portrays the "philosophy of the future" as being informed by the same unhistorical character as "pre-modern philosophy", in particular classical antiquity. Indeed, he goes so far as to advocate

adopting the classical world as our model. “*But there we also discover the reality of an essentially unhistorical culture and one which is nonetheless, or rather on that account, an inexpressibly richer and more vital culture*” (103/VIII.2).

Strauss concludes his essay with an eye to the “philosophy of the future”. Strauss entire effort in subjecting historicism to critical analysis, to critical history, is in the service of a ‘new age’. The specific character of that ‘new age’, however, remains obscure. Strauss thus seems guilty of deploying “the historical drive” without a corresponding “drive to construct”. Nietzsche warns that “if the purpose of destroying and clearing is not to allow a future already alive in anticipation to raise its house on the ground thus liberated, if justice alone prevails, then the instinct for creation will be enfeebled and discouraged” (95/VII.1). However, through alluding to Nietzsche throughout the essay, in particular at the conclusion of the essay, Strauss demonstrates that far from lacking a “drive to construct”, he is pointing to Nietzsche’s own vision of “a future already alive in anticipation”. Just as he had left the problem of future change, and the deadly truths of evolution to “the political philosophers of the future”, so Strauss leaves the affirmative project -- thus wholeheartedly endorsing it -- to Nietzsche.

CONCLUSION

And yet the Strauss who came to know Nietzsche so deeply seems to say No to Nietzsche? Why is that? Why, having understood Nietzsche as he did, did Strauss hold him at a distance and hold him up to attack? Why was Strauss content to be seen as Nietzsche's enemy, as someone who shared and fed the already existing prejudice against Nietzsche?¹

Lampert advances this series of challenging questions by way of arguing the need for a radical re-examination of Strauss' relationship with Nietzsche, beginning with Strauss' essay 'Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*'. We presume that he would welcome the preceding commentaries insofar as they further substantiate his case for the Nietzschean character of Strauss' thought, especially if they might contribute to answering those most taxing queries. In this spirit, we will conclude our own examination by reviewing what can be gleaned from Strauss' essays 'What is Liberal Education?' and 'Political Philosophy and History' that may facilitate answering these questions.

In discussing the reasons for a philosopher's concealing the actual lineage of his views, or for esoteric writing generally, Strauss always begins with political and moral motives. As we have seen in 'Political Philosophy and History', a philosopher of the past sometimes must adapt "the expression of his thought to [his contemporary] situation in order to be listened to at all" (14). The philosophic writer thus combines his philosophic teaching with a "tract for the times" which he tailors to his own circumstances, "the prejudices of his contemporaries" (14), in order to avoid persecution and gain a fair hearing for what he has to say. Furthermore, insofar as he is aware that "all political action is concerned with, and therefore presupposes appropriate knowledge of, individual situations" (10), he may carefully confine his recommendations for future

¹ Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, p3.

change to what is feasible or desirable in the circumstances.

As we noted in our discussion of ‘What is Liberal Education?’, genuine philosophy, entailing as it does a radical questioning of received views, is always and everywhere at odds with politics. More than this, a beautiful portrait of philosophy can provoke a dangerous dissatisfaction with oneself. Of course, this is equally the case with the question of the best or just political order: the answer may cause a dangerous dissatisfaction with one’s political situation. The open presentation of such a teaching, paired with an unsparing critique of the present can be potentially revolutionary. At the personal level of the individual, the philosophic teacher may recognize that certain philosophic or scientific truths would not improve the lives or well-being of everyone who might be exposed to them. This we observed in comparing Strauss’ and Nietzsche’s respective treatments of the deadly truths of evolutionary theory, for example. Nietzsche warned of the political consequences of teaching such a doctrine, and Strauss, obligingly, mostly concealed them.

Also, however, there are pedagogic reasons for esoteric writing. That is, in making the philosophic teaching difficult of access, a philosophic writer challenges his readers with paradoxes, conspicuous silences, and puzzles as a means of enticing him to philosophize himself, thereby training his philosophic faculties. Moreover, in setting oneself up as an adversary to another philosophic writer, the challenge is compounded, and thus the pedagogic benefit doubled. Such a writer obliges those among his readership serious about the truth to labor through the historical question of what two thinkers thought, to the philosophic question of which, if either, is true. As we learned in ‘What is Liberal Education?’, by working to bring about a conversation between two (or more) of the greatest minds, we develop the skills requisite to our eventually becoming competent

judges. Only if this is possible does philosophic writing make sense.

Bearing in mind this brief survey of the general reasons for cautious writing, we might offer some speculations as to why Strauss went to such lengths to conceal from most readers his deep affinity with Nietzsche, while nonetheless making it possible for a certain sort of reader to discover the truth for himself.

Recall that in responding to the ridicule of the “old-fashioned” in ‘Political Philosophy and History’, Strauss granted that he was tailoring his own writing to his own circumstances (16). What are Strauss’ circumstances? It is 1949, he is in America, and teaching at a major university. Moreover, he is “familiar with the ravages wrought by historicism”, and writes this essay originally for publication in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. And when republishing it in a collection of his own arrangement, Strauss chooses this essay to follow directly the “intemperate attack” on Nietzsche which concludes the title essay, ‘What is Political Philosophy?’ There, Strauss apparently attributes to Nietzsche some responsibility for “a regime, which as long as it lasted, made discredited democracy look again like a golden age.”² In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss warns against the *reductio ad Hitlerum* argument, lamenting that at present its patent inadequacy “does not go without saying”.³ In short, we believe the primary reason -- or at least the primary *political* reason -- for Strauss’ reluctance to openly associate himself with Nietzsche is that such association connects one to Hitler, and the horrors of fascism. Indeed, Nietzsche did not become a respectable philosophic figure once again until substantially later (for many he remains suspect even today). No one determined to do battle with the behaviorists and positivists for the soul of contemporary political

² *What is Political Philosophy?*, p55.

³ *Natural Right and History*, p42.

science would see any point in associating himself with Nietzsche. We suspect that whatever impact Strauss himself had in breaking the behaviorist stranglehold on American political science would have been seriously compromised had he himself been open to the *reductio ad Hitlerum* ‘argument’. What sort of hearing would anyone get whose arguments were understood as derived from a writer popular with Nazis, and who was widely understood to have gone insane? Strauss himself broaches the possibility that Nietzsche is only excused from the charge of political irresponsibility by virtue of having been regarded as insane.⁴

The point is that Strauss had practical purposes in writing. He endeavors to reform the views of his contemporaries within the limits of the possible. He seeks to return them to natural right, to the lost tradition of esoteric writing, to repudiate historicism, to prepare the way for “the philosophy of the future”. In order to do so, however, he would have to be most careful not to alienate those who are easily frightened, while still captivating those who could become bored. In short he must be prudent. In this connection, it is helpful to review what Strauss says about Locke:

The most famous and the most influential of all modern natural right teachers was John Locke. But Locke makes it particularly difficult to recognize how modern he is or how much he deviates from the natural right tradition. He was an eminently prudent man, and he reaped the reward of superior prudence: he was listened to by many people and he wielded an extraordinarily great influence on men of affairs and on a large body of opinion. But it is of the essence of prudence that one know when to speak and when to be silent. Knowing this very well, Locke had the good sense to quote only the right kind of writers and to be silent about the wrong kind, although he had more in common, in the last analysis, with the wrong kind than with the right.⁵

⁴ *What is Political Philosophy?* p231. Cf. *Persecution and the Art of Writing* p36.

⁵ *Natural Right and History*, p165.

Notice how Strauss depicts Hobbes, that example of a “wrong kind of writer” who Locke had “more in common with”:

Thomas Hobbes -- that imprudent, impish, and iconoclastic extremist, that first plebeian philosopher, who is so enjoyable as a writer because of his almost boyish straightforwardness⁶

Nietzsche, often charged by Strauss with imprudence, is -- or was, in Strauss’ circumstances -- “the wrong kind of writer”.

As Strauss notes in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, “What attitude people adopt toward freedom of public discussion depends decisively on what they think about popular education and its limits.”⁷ Strauss, however, as we noted in discussing liberal education, does “not expect that liberal education can ever become universal education. It will always remain the obligation and the privilege of a minority.”⁸

Thus, as we noted in discussing the brief ninth paragraph of ‘Political Philosophy and History’, Strauss can not dare to try to do more than merely indicate some of the considerations which should prevent one from taking historicism for granted, at least partly because his being daring and immoderate would rob his efforts of much if not all of their popular pedagogic effect.

But what about his more exclusive pedagogic intentions? His almost sole concern with “education at its best or highest,” that of “the perfect prince”? Is this higher, more important sort of education not hindered by Strauss’ concealing his relationship to Nietzsche? After all, Strauss himself shows (we contend) how personally profitable the study of Nietzsche can be. So, by seeming to oppose Nietzsche, by “holding him up for attack”, does Strauss not obstruct potential princes from similarly benefiting from

⁶ *Ibid.*, p166.

⁷ *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p33.

⁸ *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p24.

Nietzsche as educator? To the contrary. Precisely in *not* ‘domesticating’ Nietzsche, in not apologizing for his apparent excesses, and softening his shocking rhetoric (a la Walter Kaufmann), and by instead helping to maintain Nietzsche’s chosen personae as ‘Immoralist’, ‘AntiChrist’, and enemy of Socrates, Strauss keeps Nietzsche ‘dangerous’, ‘forbidden’, ‘questionable’. Just as Strauss reports that he encountered Nietzsche through furtive reading, he ensures that Nietzsche will continue to be furtively read (at least by some of Strauss’ more adventurous and free-spirited students), and thus he does Nietzsche a service. Those who read Nietzsche, and have come to love reading Nietzsche, recognize that much if not most of his educative value derives from what is shocking and dangerous, what is forbidden. His writing is, like Hobbes’, boyish.

Furthermore, in setting himself in opposition to Nietzsche, in appearing as an enemy to Nietzsche, he keeps the importance of Nietzsche alive. Moreover, in treating Nietzsche ambiguously, at times praising him, at other times attacking him, Strauss obliges his readers and students to come to terms with these apparently contradictory assessments, and thereby inhibits dogmatism -- at least among those who do not read selectively, like “plundering soldiers”, appropriating only what they like. Strauss forces his students to choose between himself and Nietzsche, or to see through their surface disagreement to their profound kinship.

And insofar as his own teaching is a publicly palatable version of Nietzsche’s teaching, a version that, while critical -- indeed, deeply critical of democracy’s deeper tendencies -- remains compatible with liberal democracy, he actually furthers Nietzsche’s project through his own unsuspecting students.

The ascendancy of a planetary aristocracy is not an immediate possibility. But on Nietzsche’s account, the future realization of the philosophers of the future depends

decisively on their being free-spirits (or free-minds, or liberally educated minds), freed from the dogmatism which has prejudiced past study of the philosophers, open to the religious essence, armed with a natural history of right, scholars with virtues, attuned to their nations, and directed to the noble. In the best cases, Strauss has nurtured such free-minds, and has been extraordinarily successful in getting a hearing for philosophy in the contemporary academy.

Are we not, then, by exposing Strauss' Nietzschean affiliation, undermining his own efforts and any continued impact he is to have? This would depend upon contemporary circumstances. That is, have the circumstances significantly changed in the three decades since Strauss' death? While this could be conclusively answered only through a much longer argument, we cannot fail to take note of two massive changes in the current circumstances that do warrant a revisiting Nietzsche through Strauss, or vice versa. Firstly, as we observed in our introduction, Strauss has been largely successful in his efforts at reforming contemporary study of political science, and in particular the history of political philosophy. That is, behaviorism is dead, the American regime -- its original founding and its successive transformations -- is the subject of serious study, and the history of political philosophy is once again a hot-bed of genuinely philosophical discussion in universities around the world.

Secondly, the misappropriation of Nietzsche by the Nazis is at present widely acknowledged. In its place, however, a new danger to Nietzsche's teaching -- that is, to maintaining its pedagogical power and thus its political effect -- has emerged, which in certain respects (though probably not politically) is as potentially harmful as its bizarre co-option by the anti-Semites. This new threat to 'the philosophy of the future' is

Nietzsche's appropriation by the post-modern left. Quite how Nietzsche could ever have been misread as a sentimental, nature-loving, left-leaning, pluralist concerned with 'empowering' the supposedly oppressed masses, taxes the imagination. Nonetheless, it appears to have happened, though no doubt without much regard to interpretive rigor or the rational integrity of his thought. In any event, the threat of Nietzsche himself being 'metabolized' so as to preclude any possibility of his having a lasting impact on the world's future calls for serious response.

Unfortunately, Nietzsche is no longer the menacing specter he once was. To the contrary, he is at risk of not being taken seriously at all as the result of his being co-opted by into the fashionable cynicism and self-congratulatory 'ironic' playfulness that characterizes so much academic discourse today, and not least of all academic philosophy. In particular, Nietzsche's politics, the politics of philosophy, risks being altogether overlooked. This view must be corrected, if Nietzsche is to continue to be a source of insight and inspiration -- living proof for *us* that the philosophic life is possible in our time, as Schopenhauer was for him.

Finally, we are excused in our unmasking of Strauss by the unfortunate tendency to orthodoxy that has of late become acceptable to many of Strauss' students, who in turn convey it to their students. By exposing Strauss' relationship with Nietzsche, those among his students who are serious about coming to know themselves through reflection on their educator, and who take up the task of returning to teachers who are not in turn pupils, are reminded of the ever-present threat to such efforts posed by dogmatism, and thereby, of the need to reconsider the rich legacy of both Strauss and Nietzsche, again and again.

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